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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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MURDER IS A
DEADLY GAME
NEW MIKE SHAYNE
Short Novel
by BRETT HALLIDAY

THE THING INVISIBLE
a DETECTIVES BY
GASLIGHT classic
by WILLIAM HOPE
HODGSON

ESCAPE ME NEVER
A New JOHNNY HAWK
Thriller by
EDWARD Y. BREESE

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MIKE SHAYNE



MYSTERY MAGAZINE

JUNE, 1973
VOL. 33, NO. 1

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL MURDER IS A DEADLY GAME

by BRETT HALLIDAY

She was ravishing, young, man-bait in every fibre of her perfect body. She was also a lethal high priestess of Murder, poised to strike again. Could Mike Shayne find the one weapon which could stop her in time?

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MURDER
IS A
DEADLY
GAME



THE NEW COMPLETE MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

*He had money and a future, she had looks and a past.
Could Mike Shayne, marked for death, find a way
to break the unholy alliance between them and
come back with a key to Murder and still alive?*



by Brett Halliday

THE MAN who came into Mike Shayne's office was in his middle forties, a little above average height, stocky, with deep grey eyes and stern features. Lucy Hamilton looked up from her desk, puckered her smooth forehead and smiled inquiringly at the visitor.

"May I help you, sir?"

"My name is Oliver Reed. I'd

like to talk with Mike Shayne." "Did you have an appointment, sir?" she asked politely. Reed's tone turned impatient. "No, I didn't. I didn't know I needed one." His tone became rasping. "Doctors, lawyers, dentists, psychiatrists. And now private investigators. Is Shayne in?"

Mike Shayne came out of his

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office, stood in the doorway and regarded Oliver Reed curiously. "You want to see me, sir?"

"You're Mike Shayne?" the man said.

"I am."

"Yes, I want to see you. Do I need an appointment?" His tone was still one of impatience.

"Not any more. Come in, please." He stood aside to allow Reed to pass. Shayne closed the door. He nodded to a chair. "Sit down, Mr. Reed."

Reed dropped into the indicated chair, jerked a pack of Luckies from a jacket pocket, lit one and exhaled in a fury of smoke.

"Now then, Mr. Reed, what can I do for you?" Shayne asked.

"First of all, I want to ask you if you read of the robbery of the Gulfstream Finance Corporation four days ago?"

"Two million dollars in bearer bonds. Yes, I read of it."

"I am the president of the Investors Guild of Miami. It's a private organization with some three thousand members. Our main function is that of a watchdog over companies and corporations in which members of the Guild invest their money. The investors are mostly small people, widows, retirees, teachers, and others in the middle

income group who invest their money for future security."

"I've heard of your Guild. You people do a fine job. How can I be of service?"

"I suspect this robbery. I'm not making any direct accusation, you understand, Mr. Shayne. However, I'm not satisfied with the circumstances related to the police by Bruce Wayne."

"Who is Bruce Wayne?"

"President of Gulfstream Finance."

"I see. Well, Mr. Reed, the police are pretty thorough in instances of robberies in which huge sums of money or valuables have been taken. I'm sure they are giving this their fullest attention."

"Yes, and so is the insurance company. I'm aware of that."

"Then why do you want me on the case? I presume that's why you are here."

"It is. First of all, the insurance covers only a million dollars of the amount. That means that every investor will lose half or more of his total investment. We can't afford to let that happen."

"You're suggesting that Bruce Wayne may have staged this robbery? Is that correct, Mr. Reed?"

"It's a suspicion."

Shayne shook his head. "Bruce Wayne couldn't be that

foolish. The police and insurance investigators will stay with this until Wayne gets to be an old man or makes a wrong move, which he is bound to do, sooner or later, and then—it's all over."

"Maybe so. We, the investors, can't wait that long. Those people are very disturbed. You can understand that, I'm sure. We've already had a dozen or more visits from various groups and hundreds of telephone calls. We want to get to the bottom of this as quickly as possible." He leaned forward, spoke emphatically. "And the bonds recovered!"

Shayne thought a while, ran a big hand through his thick red hair. "I assume you want this to be an independent investigation, completely removed from those of the police and the insurance company. Is that correct?"

"That's right. I want you to dig into Wayne's activities, his background, his daily habits, acquaintances, friends, everything you can find out about him. I think you'll run into something."

"Okay. What can you tell me about him now that you know?"

"He's married. No children. I don't know if the marriage is working or not. If it isn't, you may get some hot leads."

"Describe him," the big detective said.

"Fifty or fifty-one. Looks younger. Tall, slender. I guess women would think him attractive. He has that executive look. Dark hair graying at the temples, regular features, tanned, plays a lot of golf, makes frequent trips to one place or another. Resorts."

"What about Gulfstream Finance? What's its background?"

"Wayne started it about ten years ago, originally as a small loan company. The business grew. He went public about five years ago. Since then it has been primarily engaged in consumer and commercial lending and financing, and in some insurance underwriting, through subsidiaries. There are six such offices. There is no stock as such. It is strictly in the form of lock-in yields, up to nine and a half percent through ownership of senior ranking corporate promissory notes. Is that complicated to you?"

"I've got a fairly good idea. As a starter. I'll learn more as I go along."

"Then you'll take the assignment?"

Shayne nodded. "Yes. You understand my fees?"

"No, I don't. Whatever it is. You can bill the Guild."

"If you prefer, I'll take the

case on a flat fee basis and I'll assume all expenses."

"That's agreeable."

"Twenty-five thousand dollars."

"Fair enough. One more question."

"Shoot."

"Is that contingent upon your finding and returning the bonds?"

"Nope. Win or lose. I may find out where the bonds are, or who has them. I shall then notify the police and the insurance company. If I am lucky enough to locate them—" Shayne shrugged—"well, that will be the frosting on the cake."

"That's good enough."

"I'll have my secretary type out a memo of agreement which I shall want you to sign."

"Very well. Is there a retainer?"

"Nope. Flat fee."

Reed rose from his chair, extended his hand.

Shayne's first stop was at the County Building, where he asked to examine the registration filed by Bruce Wayne under the name of the Gulfstream Finance Corporation. He studied the information Wayne had given when he registered the company. Everything seemed to be in order. His next stop was at the Security and Exchange Commission. He

told the receptionist he would like to talk with Mr. John Bradford.

"Do you have an appointment, sir?"

Shayne grinned. "No. I'm an old friend. Tell Mr. Bradford it's Mike Shayne." He gave the girl his best personality smile.

She smiled shyly. "Yes, sir, Mr. Shayne." She pressed some buttons on an intercom, said, "Mr. Bradford, Mr. Mike Shayne to see you. Yes, sir."

"Third door to the left?" Shayne said.

"That's it. You've been here before?"

"I practically lived here for a while. Thanks."

"Not at all." She favored him with a more assured smile that had in it a veiled invitation. She watched his back as he strode long-leggedly toward Bradford's office and let out a sigh.

John Bradford rose to greet Shayne as he came in. Bradford was almost as tall as Shayne, with dark wavy hair, dark eyes, and a full mustache. He had been a Whiz Kid in the Kennedy administration, an astute, brilliant economist. "Haven't seen you in a dog's age, Mike. What've you been up to lately besides your usual tricks?"

"Just the usual tricks, Brad. How've you been?"

"Fine. Sit down."

Shayne sat down in a chair alongside the desk, crossed his legs. "I need some information, Brad. Gulfstream Financial Corporation. Bruce Wayne."

"I'm familiar with it. Quite a shocker. Two million dollars in bearer bonds. You on the case?"

"Yep. Oliver Reed."

"Investors Guild. Good man. What's the angle?"

"Reed suspects a little hanky panky."

"Quite possible. It has some peculiar aspects to it. There's been some discussion around here the past three days. We found no fault with Wayne's sinking of the corporation's funds in bearer bonds. That's understandable. It offered a quick conversion into cash if a commercial loan of a sizable amount came up. However, keeping the two million in his safe is open to a great deal of argument and conjecture. What have you learned so far?"

"Nothing. I checked the information Wayne submitted in the Fictitious Name Department. It all seemed in order. Routine stuff, of course. Reed offered little more other than the fact that Wayne makes many trips to resort areas."

"Such as?"

"Nassau. Jamaica. Aruba. Puerto Rico."



"How about Las Vegas?"

"He didn't say. Are you thinking the same thing I am?"

"Gambling? Heavy losses? Staging of a fake robbery? Yes, it entered my mind. He's married, isn't he?"

"Yes. Reed said he wasn't sure if the marriage was working or not. If Wayne is playing around—"

Bradford's dark eyes were thoughtful. "Have you talked with the police yet?"

"Not yet. This is supposed to be an independent investigation. I'm trying to keep it that way."

"I don't see how exchanging information with the police would conflict with your investigation. How are things between you and Will Gentry?"

"Okay. I get into his hair from time to time, but he gets

over it fast. We're good friends."

"Why don't you see what he's got so far?"

"I'd rather see what you've got, Brad?"

"I don't follow you."

"I want to look at the files on Gulfstream Finance and the confidential file on Bruce Wayne."

"You're asking a whole lot, Mike. I'm not sure I can allow that."

"Aren't you interested in getting to the bottom of this? If Wayne really staged this robbery then Gulfstream Finance is in serious trouble, with its investors losing a million dollars. That little matter is right up your alley, isn't it?"

"It is." He leaned back in his chair, then got up suddenly. "Okay, Mike, I'll go along with you."

He went to a file, opened a drawer, removed a thick file, brought it back to the desk and laid it in front of Shayne. "That's it."

Shayne opened the file. He scanned through several pages on Bruce Wayne's personal history. Wayne was born in Detroit on May 10, 1922, to Dr. Paul Wayne, an internist, and Myra Secord Wayne. There was another child, a daughter, two years Bruce's junior. Sheila Wayne had married Thomas

Rivard, scion of a wealthy real estate operator in her native Detroit and now resided in Grosse Pointe, an exclusive suburb of that city. Bruce Wayne attended private schools, earned a degree in business administration at the University of Michigan and a master's in economics at Columbia. He married Cynthia Wright in 1960, in a fashionable wedding. There were no children.

Shayne pushed the file aside. "The guy's got a helluva background. It doesn't figure."

"Do you know Cynthia Wright's background, Mike?" Bradford asked.

"No. Fill me in."

"A handsome woman, quiet, reserved. Only child of Eugene Wright. The Eugene Wright. Shipping. Lumber. Copper. A dozen or more other interests. Her mother is Millicent Stevens. Ring a bell?"

"Yep. More money than the law allows." He shook his head in a gesture of perplexity.

"Don't let it throw you, Mike. There's been dozens of cases like this. Sons of the wealthy who went wrong. Big businessmen who found themselves backed against a wall and dug into corporate or investors' funds. This one happens to be pretty raw, if our suspicions are correct. We could be as far off base as from first to centerfield."

Let's not jump to conclusions. You through with the file?"

"Okay, Brad." Shayne rose. "I'll just do a little digging into our boy's recent activities and see what I can manage to come up with."

"You intend to talk to Gentry?"

"I'll think about it. I want to be able to offer him something in exchange for what he has. I know him. He likes to trade."

"Okay, Mike. Call me if you come up with anything that will be of help to us here."

"I'll do that. Thanks for your assistance."

"My pleasure. Good to see you again."

"Same here. I'll be in touch."

II

BRUCE WAYNE met Velisha Gillette early that year at the Hialeah race track. It was in the Turf Club. She was at a table with a drink. A small, powerful pair of field glasses lay on the table beside a program. The fourth race was over. She picked up several ten dollar tickets, tore them in half and threw them on the floor.

"Bad luck?" Wayne said, and smiled.

She looked up at him. "It's the story of my life. Can't seem to pick a winner."

"Maybe I can change your luck. May I sit down?"

She tilted her blonde head to one side, let out a small sigh. "If you can change my luck, please sit down."

Bruce Wayne motioned to a waiter. "The same for the lady and I'll have Scotch and water. Pinch bottle."

The waiter took the order, left, returned a few moments later and set the drinks down.

Bruce Wayne said, "How deep are you into the day?"

"I hate to tell you."

He smiled broadly, revealing even white teeth. "Make a small effort. It won't hurt, I promise you."

"Three hundred."

"That's not such a large amount." He looked at the program. "I think I can get you even. There's a sleeper in this race." He looked toward the tote board. "Six to one. If I place a fifty dollar bet for you, you'll be even. If I place a hundred, you'll be ahead three hundred."

"Oh, I couldn't let you do that," Velisha said hurriedly. I don't even know your name." She laughed lightly, a lilting, musical laugh.

"Bruce Wayne. What's yours?"

"Velisha Gillette."

"Velisha Gillette," he repeated. "An unusual name. And

for an unusually pretty young lady, if I may say so." Small talk.

She smiled again. "You've said it. Thank you."

He raised his glass. "To better luck and a firm friendship." He waited, certain of himself. She didn't disappoint him.

"I'll drink to that." She touched his glass, and they both drank. She congratulated herself silently. She had come to the track for a pickup. This was more than she had hoped. He smelled of money, talked of money, and was ready to spend it. It wasn't anything new in her life. She had known it for the past two years. This one, however, was a notch or two above all the others, unless she was very wrong in her judgment, and she was quite certain that she wasn't.

Velisha Gillette was born Jenny Grabowski twenty-two years ago to a Polish father and mother in Scranton, Pennsylvania, where her father worked as a laborer. She left home at sixteen, went to New York, where she made a serious effort to break into show business. All she had was youth, a fresh beauty, and a look of availability. She got a job in the chorus of a night club, lived with a horn player for three months, left him and the job and got

another job as a cocktail waitress in a lounge-restaurant on Madison Avenue off 42nd Street. Here she picked up one man after another, pleaded a need for rent, clothes, money for an ailing mother, all the other cheap tricks. She didn't fool any of the men but she was young, attractive, desirable, and she had learned how to use her body at the best advantage.

One man took her for a week to Atlantic City. Another, took her to Bermuda, where she got her first taste of true luxury living in the Belmont Hotel and Golf Club in Warwick. Still another lover took her for a week's round of pleasure and gambling to Las Vegas.

When she was twenty she had saved five thousand dollars, had several pieces of good jewelry, a working wardrobe, and acquired a determination to live exquisitely, at any cost.

In November, 1970, she took a plane to Miami. On the plane she met an insurance executive. His company maintained an apartment in one of the high-rise buildings in Miami Beach. She moved in with him. When he left after two weeks during which time they visited race tracks, a different restaurant each night, two cruises on private yachts, he found her an apartment in a new building on South Ocean Drive in

Hollywood, a stone's throw from Miami Beach. He paid six month's rent for her.

He said, "I'll be coming in from time to time. I'll want you with me."

"I'll be here, waiting," she replied.

After he was gone, she found a woman companion, an attractive, highly intelligent business executive named Sherri Kremer, five years older than she. Velisha told her she had a lovely two-bedroom apartment.

"It's a little too much for me, the rent in all. I'd love to have you move in with me and share the rent. We wouldn't have to conflict with each other. We'd have our own privacy."

The idea appealed to Sherri Kremer and she moved in.

Mike Shayne decided to talk with Cynthia Wayne. He found her at home. The residence in the exclusive Bal Harbour section was a show place.

"I was told Mr. Wayne was at home," he said. "It's very important that I see him and talk with him."

"I'm sorry but he's not here. Is it about business?"

"Well, yes and no. It concerns the robbery. My name is Michael Shayne. I'm a private investigator."

"For the insurance company?"

"No. I'm on assignment for the Investors Guild."

"I see." She stood there in the doorway, for several long moments, then, "Come in, Mr. Shayne."

She led him into the library, pointed to a chair. Shayne sat down. She was a woman of obvious charm and dignity.

She said, "Do you just investigate robberies, Mr. Shayne?"

"No. My services are open to anyone who needs them."

"I see. Does that mean you also investigate people?"

"Sometimes?"

She rose from the divan and walked away from him toward the opposite wall and stood there for a short time staring out the large picture window that faced the garden. She turned back to him, returned to the divan.

"Mr. Shayne, would you be interested in investigating a young woman?"

"For what purpose?"

"I'm not sure." She was thoughtful again. "I may be leading myself into a deeper hell but I feel the one I already live in has become utterly untenable. I have been on the verge of a nervous breakdown for some time. I can no longer go on this way."

"How can I help?"

"I want to be frank with

you, Mr. Shayne. My marriage has been foundering for years. I've done everything a woman can possibly do to make it work. I've failed. I don't know if it was my fault or if my husband isn't the kind for marriage. All this, the home, cars, the original investment in Gulfstream Finance, was my money."

"Are you a principal stockholder in Gulfstream Finance?" Shayne asked.

"I hold a partnership."

Shayne felt he was onto something hot. He decided to shoot both barrels at her. "Mrs. Wright—I'm sorry, Mrs. Wayne—"

"You said *Wright*. You have already checked that out?"

"I'm afraid I have."

"For what purpose?"

"The robbery of Gulfstream Finance is suspect."

"The people at Investors Guild believe that?"

"They do. That is, Mr. Reed does. Mrs. Wayne, I think you should know this. The articles of incorporation do not list you as a partner. Only your husband. And, of course, those investors who hold the lock-in notes."

She didn't wince. "I was afraid of that. You see, I never bothered to investigate the company. There was no reason to do so. I had complete

confidence in my husband. Confidence and faith."

"How much was your initial investment?"

"Five hundred thousand dollars."

"If the bonds are not recovered, you stand to lose half your investment. The insurance covers only a million dollars."

"I could stand that if my husband were faithful."

"This woman you want me to investigate—why?"

"I suspect that my husband has been seeing her. Her name is Velisha Gillette."

"Do you know her address?"

"Yes. The South Poinciana Apartments in Hollywood."

"I'd like to ask you a rather painful question. I'll need your honest answer."

"Mr. Shayne, I pride myself on my strict honesty and, at times, rather brutal candor. What is your question?"

"Do you believe the possibility exists that the robbery of Gulfstream Finance may have been a fake, staged by your husband?"

Her gaze didn't waver from Shayne's face. "Yes, that thought entered my mind. There were times in the past when my husband was a compulsive gambler. My father learned of it and threatened to

liquidate Gulfstream Finance. There was quite a row. Bruce then promised to stop all gambling."

"Do you believe that he did?"

"For a time, yes. After that, I was quite certain he began again. Do you think he lost heavily and dug into the corporation's funds?"

"Bearer bonds are easily cashed. Any bank will take them at face value. Suppose it's true, and you learned of it?"

"I would cover the loss." She paused, was deeply thoughtful. "But after that I could no longer go on living with him."

"I hope, for your sake, your husband is innocent. If not, I guess Investors Guild would insist on removing your husband from any interest in the corporation. Mr. Reed may even insist on criminal prosecution. If I can help, should that contingency arise, I shall be glad to do so." He rose. "This hasn't been a very pleasant interview for you. I'm sorry."

She rose from the divan. "I'm made of stern stuff, Mr. Shayne. You will take the matter of the Gillette woman as an assignment? Whatever your fee. Just send me a bill."

"Yes, of course. If there has been theft she may be a co-conspirator, in it neck deep.

I'll report to you any information I may obtain."

She extended her hand. "Thank you. I'm very grateful."

III

MIKE SHAYNE drove to the South Poinciana Apartments in Hollywood, checked the board. There were two names listed for apartment 7-D, Velisha Gillette and Sherri Kremer. He rang the bell. There was a wait of several moments and then a voice came through.

"Yes? Who is it?"

"My name is Mike Shayne. I'm a private investigator. Are you Miss Gillette?"

"No. I'm Miss Kremer. Miss Gillette is out of town."

"I'd like to talk to you. It's very important to Miss Gillette."

"Well, I don't know. Show your credentials to the security guard at the door. If he says it's okay you can come up."

"Thanks. I'll do that."

Shayne talked to the security guard, showed him his credentials. "Miss Kremer said that if I satisfy you she'll talk with me."

"Sure, Mr. Shayne. I know about you. I'll tell her." He picked up the phone, called apartment 7-D. "Miss Kremer. This is Oscar, the security guard. I checked Mr. Shayne's

credentials. It's okay." He turned to Shayne. "You can go up, Mr. Shayne. Take the center elevator. It's to your left when you get off. Three apartments down."

"Thanks, Oscar."

Shayne went up to the seventh floor, found 7-D, rang the bell. It was answered almost immediately. The woman who stood before him was in her mid-twenties. She was personable. Dark hair, dark eyes, full breasted. The slacks and blouse she wore didn't hide any of her other charms either.

"I'm Mike Shayne, Miss Kremer."

"Come in, Mr. Shayne." She stood away and he went in. She moved to the opposite end of the room, her movements fluid, sat down facing him.

"She's really something," Shayne thought. "With that figure and face she's golden wolf bait. I wonder how the other one looks."

He took a chair and sat down. It was comfortable, a man's chair. "May I smoke?" he asked.

"Of course. Now, what can I do for you? You said it was very important to Miss Gillette."

"You're her roommate. You must know a great deal about her."

"I'm listening, Mr. Shayne."

There was a slight note of irritation in her tone.

"Do you know Bruce Wayne?"

"Yes. He's been here many times, to pick up Velisha when they were going out to dinner or wherever it was they were going."

"You know of the robbery of the Gulfstream Finance Corporation?"

"Yes. Velisha mentioned it and I read of it in the papers."

"Did Miss Gillette discuss the robbery with you? At any length?"

"Only that there had been a robbery and that Mr. Wayne was very disturbed about it. Velisha doesn't talk too much about her personal affairs."

"Well, there has been the usual girl talk, hasn't there?"

There was no anger or resentment in her tone as she said, "Mr. Shayne, what is it exactly you're after? What do you want to know? If you'll be honest with me, I promise you I shall be honest with you."

"Thanks, Miss Kremer. I appreciate that. Now, in all honesty, the robbery of the Gulfstream Finance Corporation is suspect."

"The police believe that?"

"I haven't talked with the police. I represent the—I'll call them stockholders—Investors Guild. They are small investors,



the usual group of middle income people who invest for future security. The robbery may prove to be a tragic loss to most of those people. There is only half of the loss covered by insurance. One million dollars. My job is to recover the bearer bonds."

"Two million dollars in bearer bonds?" she said. "That's rather unusual, to keep that much in negotiable securities in a safe."

"Exactly. That is one of the reasons why the robbery is suspect. The feeling is that those bonds should have been kept in a bank vault."

"And you're saying that Velisha may be involved in some way, in the actual theft? I don't believe it."

"Why do you say that?"

"Mr. Shayne, I know something of people. I've dealt with them most of my adult life. I'm in apartment management. I've met all kinds. It's my business to separate the wheat from the chaff, allow only desirable people into the buildings I manage. Velisha doesn't strike me as being a thief."

"Miss Kremer, in my business I have come across men and women with impeccable reputations who were guilty of the most heinous crimes. Theft is the least of those. Under certain circumstances, pressures of one kind or another, honor and integrity is for the birds. What do you know about Velisha Gillette?"

"She's very attractive, the kind men of all ages seem to flock to for one reason or another, and with one thought in mind or another. She's been on her own since she was sixteen. I gathered there were many men in her life."

"What is her means of support?"

Sherri Kremer shrugged. "At the moment, Mr. Wayne. Before that, other men. I suppose, if she were living in another age she would be referred to as a courtesan. Now, I'm not certain. That's the whole point. Don't you see? She doesn't have to become involved in

anything shady. Men will give her money, pay her rent, buy her clothes, take her everywhere. As I said, she's a very attractive young women. Other women might say she is glossy or brittle or even hard. Men look at her with different eyes."

"Is there a photograph of her here?"

Sherri Kremer went into the bedroom at the rear of the apartment, returned a moment later with a gold frame in which was a picture of Velisha and a man.

"That's Bruce Wayne with her," she said.

Shayne studied the picture. "She's attractive, all right. I see your point." He looked up. "Did you know that Bruce Wayne is married?"

"Yes. I believe she mentioned it once. There has hardly been any girl talk, as you refer to it."

"What about you? Have you confided in her?"

She smiled. "Velisha doesn't listen to other women, only to men. I'm not one for a lot of idle conversation either. I bring work home and devote myself to that. Frankly, Mr. Shayne, I am moving from this apartment as soon as Velisha returns. I have been given a rather large complex to manage. I'm moving into one of the apartments."

"You said, 'as soon as Velisha returns.' Do you know where she went, and with whom?"

"Yes. She went to Paradise Island with Mr. Wayne. I don't know if they will stay there or go on to one of the other islands. If I remember correctly, I think she mentioned the Paradise Island Hotel."

"One more question. Keeping in mind the fact that the sum of two million dollars is involved, would you say that Velisha Gillette would be tempted to involve herself in the theft?"

"You mean, if she thought she could get the whole two million?"

"Precisely."

She smiled a crooked little smile. "Mr. Shayne, who wouldn't?"

The redhead rose from his seat. "Thanks for talking with me. You've been very helpful."

IV

SHERRI KREMER saw him to the door. He went down in the elevator, thanked the security guard again, got into his car and drove to Miami, parked in an empty space outside police headquarters and went in toward Will Gentry's office. The Miami Chief of Police came out of his office at

that moment with two men from Homicide.

Gentry's face was grim. "You want to see me, Mike?"

"Yes. Important."

"Be with you in about five minutes. Go on into my office."

Will Gentry returned about ten minutes later. He strode into his office, dropped into the chair behind his desk, brushed a hand over his forehead. "Well, Mike," he barked, "what the hell now?"

"The Gulfstream Finance robbery."

Gentry's reaction couldn't have been more violent than if Shayne had suddenly dropped a time bomb in the chief's lap. Gentry half rose in his seat. "The Gulfstream Finance robbery! What the hell do you think I've been bugged about the last four days? Everybody from the Commissioner on down on my neck. Reporters all over the place. And now you! Let me tell you something. We picked up a stiff in a field over on West Avenue. Shot once in the back of the head with a .32. You know what he had on him?"

"The Pentagon papers."

"Very funny. Tell me how funny this is. He had five of those bearer bonds on him from the Gulfstream robbery! We had to release the story to the

papers!" He rubbed a hand across his face. "No clues. No nothing!"

"Did you get a make on the stiff?"

"Yeah. An ex-con named Joe Ross. Pulled time in Michigan, Ohio, California and Illinois."

"How long was he dead?"

"The coroner figures two days. Now, where the hell did he get those bonds? How did he get them? And who knocked him off and why? You got any answers?"

"Two days, eh? Interesting."

"What's interesting about it?" Gentry demanded. "You know anything about this?"

"A little. Look, the way I see it, you can discount the killing as an underworld hit, if that's what you were thinking."

"I wasn't thinking anything. Let's have your theory, if that's all it is."

"Professional hit-men use a .38. This killing was done by an amateur. This Joe Ross may have been the guy, or one of the guys, who blew the safe at Gulfstream."

"How do you know the safe was blown?"

"I don't. I'm guessing."

"You guessed wrong. It was drilled. The tumblers were knocked off, and that was it. All those nice bearer bonds asking to be taken, and they

were taken. Two million dollars worth."

"I'm not sure the guy got the two million. I also doubt that he was the only one in on the job. I figure there were at least two and possibly three."

"Are you working on this case?" Gentry demanded.

"Only to recover the bonds. I was hired by Oliver Reed, head of Investors Guild. What was Ross' racket? Did he have a record of safe jobs?"

"No. Burglary, robbery, counterfeiting."

"Then there had to be someone else with him, someone who knew how to drill a safe. That's pretty tricky. It takes a real pro. The question now is, did his partner or partners knock him off? If so, why?"

"I'm listening."

"My theory is that his partner or partners didn't knock him off. Next, the bonds were deliberately left on his person."

"Okay. Now tell me why."

"To implicate him in the robbery."

"What the hell for?"

"To divert suspicion from the real thief or thieves."

"And who do you figure are the real thieves, wise guy?"

"Bruce Wayne and a chick named Velisha Gillette."

"I think you're nuts. We

checked Wayne out thoroughly. The guy is loaded."

"You're wrong, Will. Bruce Wayne isn't loaded. His wife and her family are. It was her money, a half million dollars, that was originally invested in Gulfstream Finance."

"This is strictly a theory, right? Or do you know something factual?"

"Strictly a theory."

"I think you're nuts!" Gentry swiveled around in his chair then back again. "Who's this Velisha Gillette?"

"I was waiting for you to ask me that. Wayne's latest love life. Been with her about a year or more. Pays her rent, buys her clothes, trinkets, the expensive kind. She's an expensive girl."

"How do you know all this?"

"Her roommate. Velisha is a very sexy gal, sharp as a razor. Dark hair, dark eyes, and a figure that sings." He clacked his tongue. "A real dish."

"I didn't ask you for a Playboy centerfold, Mike, only how you know she's expensive."

"Sherri Kremer, her roommate, filled me in. That pad they live in must go for about five or six hundred a month. The furniture is decorator stuff. And talking about playmates, Bruce Wayne is one a girl like this Velisha dreams about. He's

hooked on her and, unless I miss my guess, she's going to hook him, but good. And that's a pretty good theory, Will."

"How about this Sherri Kremer gal? Is she clean?"

"Like a hound's tooth. She's moving out of there as soon as Miss Gillette returns."

"Returns from where?"

"Paradise Island. She's there with Wayne."

"The hell you say! I told Wayne to stick around in case I wanted to talk to him. When did they leave?"

"I blew that. I forgot to ask Sherri Kremer about it. I'll follow it up, if you don't object to my working with you."

"How the hell can I object! You're on the case, aren't you. I want to tell you one thing, Mike! I know you. Don't involve yourself in anything my men are working on. Len Sturgis is heading the team on the case. You know Sturgis. Get in his way and he'll bend you in two. You're big. Sturgis is bigger. Harder. Tougher. And all cop. Don't forget it."

"I've got a good memory," Shayne replied ruefully, recalling his run-in with Sturgis, one of the ablest detectives on the Miami Police Force. "He won't object to trading information with me, will he?"

"I'll take care of that. One more thing. You tell that

skinny reporter pal of yours on the *News* to lay off for awhile. He's in my hair."

"Tim. Rourke? Sure. No problem."

"I'm not so sure. You tell him if he pushes me too hard I'm going to shove him through a keyhole. I've got enough trouble already without his sarcastic stories in the *News*."

"Keep cool, Will. I'll talk to Tim." Shayne picked up his Panama, dropped it on his head. "I'll see you."

He walked out, got into his car and drove to his office. Lucy Hamilton, his attractive secretary, looked up as he came in.

"Now that you've returned from the dead," Lucy Hamilton said, "perhaps you can give me a briefing of your escapades, just for the record."

"I'm on a very hot case."

"I'll bet," she sniffed. "This phone has been ringing all day and all I could say was that I didn't know where you were, with whom, or when you would be back. I must have sounded pretty stupid to all those callers. Tim Rourke phoned. He said he wanted you to get in touch with him as soon as you came in. I told him you eloped with Raquel Welsh."

"I'll bet he believed you."

"On the contrary. He said the Welsh dish was in his

apartment at the moment. I believed him." She brushed a silky stray lock of dark brown hair from her forehead. "What's up, Mike?" she asked.

He patted her head gently. "Actually, angel, I'm trying to recover two million dollars in bonds."

"The Gulfstream Finance robbery? I know of it."

Small lines of concentration suddenly appeared at the corners of his eyes. His thoughts took him into Will Gentry's office, and Gentry's statement, 'The coroner figures two days.' Joe Ross had been killed two days before. Suppose Bruce Wayne and Velisha Gillette left for Paradise Island two days ago? It could mean they were establishing an alibi. They could have killed Ross earlier the day they left. Ships sailing out of Miami for the islands usually depart between four and five o'clock in the afternoon. A theory. No more. But hell, you start with a theory and work it out into a solution.

Shayne strode into his office, sat down at his desk, opened the bottom drawer, took out the bottle of cognac, splashed a dollop of the brandy into a glass and downed it. Killers? Wayne and Gillette? Or, just Wayne? Or just Gillette? Why her? He ran a hand across

the reddish stubble on his jaw. What was it that Sherri Kremer had said?

"That's the whole point. Don't you see? She doesn't have to become involved in anything shady. Men will give her money, pay her rent, buy her clothes, take her everywhere."

There was another angle to it. Ross had been killed with a .32. A light gun. The kind a woman would use. A snub-nosed .32. Light and easy to handle. There was also the prize. Two million dollars. Sherri Kremer had said, "Mr. Shayne, I think that for that much money I, too, would be tempted." In a jocular vein? For her, yes. For Velisha Gillette? That could be another story.

He picked up the phone. "Lucy, get me Tim Rourke." He waited. A moment later, Rourke's voice thundered in his ear.

"Where the hell have you been? I've tried to get in touch with you for two days."

"I'm on the Gulfstream Finance robbery."

"Yeah? So am I?"

"So I heard. Will Gentry wants you off his back."

Rourke hissed sarcastically. "Tsk tsk. Poor man. Two million dollars in bearer bonds. An ex-con killed who had some

of those bonds on his person. And Gentry has gotten no further on the case than the door to his office. You know what, Mike?"

"What?"

"I smell a big story. There's a lot of hanky panky in this. Bruce Wayne is a rotten bastard. He's been playing it fast and loose for years. One broad after another, all of them young, and in every color. He gambles a lot. You name it. Craps. Roulette. Horses. The old saw, fast women, slow horses, and cold dice."

"What have you learned? Facts. Not theory."

"Velisha Gillette," Rourke said. "Wayne's current doll. Right name, Jenny Grabowski. Home town, Scranton, Pennsylvania. That's as far as I got on her. The bartenders and waiters at all the cozy joints on the Beach remember her. Different guys at different times. I dug a picture of Bruce Wayne out of the morgue, showed it around. Everyone I talked to said the same thing. He was seen with this blonde doll, a real dish, in her early twenties, maybe younger. Hell, Wayne is all of fifty or more. A guy would steal from his own mother to get that baby."

"I saw a photograph of her," Shayne said. "Okay, she's a looker and Wayne is hooked on

her. Where's the proof that Wayne set up the robbery?"

"All the elements are there. Motivation. Opportunity. Wayne's history of spending. Losses at gambling."

"You couldn't build a case against Wayne on that, not even for spitting on the sidewalk. What about the Joe Ross killing? You got anything on that?"

"You bet! I checked with the wardens in Michigan, Illinois, and Ohio. The last place Ross pulled time was in Michigan. He was very chummy with a guy named Bob Summers. Summers was a peteman, a safe cracker. Got it? The warden of the Michigan State Prison is sending me a picture of Summers. I should have it today or tomorrow. When we find Summers we may begin to tie a few things together."

"Have you told Gentry about this?"

"I'm not working for Gentry. I'm working for the *News*. I want an exclusive on this. We keep this to ourselves, pally."

"You're putting me on the spot, Tim. I promised Gentry I would give him any information I got."

"You haven't got any!" Rourke shouted. "What I told you is off the record. Strictly confidential! Don't play the

hero with me, Mike. Your rep isn't at stake here. Mine is. To myself, as a reporter, see!"

"Okay, Tim. Don't blow your stack. You gave me an idea. I'm going to work on it. When you get Summers' photo have your people run off a copy for me. We'll work together on running this guy down."

"Now you're talking. I'll be in touch. If you have to run around, at least call in so I'll know where and how to get in touch with you."

"Okay, Tim. By the way, did you really have Raquel Welsh in your room?"

Rourke's laughter was loud. "Sure. She's right here with me now. You want to say hello to her?"

"Sure. Put her on."

Rourke's voice was audible through the earphone. "Raquel, baby, say hello to Mike Shayne. He's a big, dumb private eye."

A woman's voice, thin, light, flutey, came through. "Hello, Mike Shayne. This Raquel talking."

"Raquel who?"

"Silly boy. Raquel Gomez. Why not?"

Shayne hung up.

V

SHAYNE GLANCED at his watch. Six o'clock. He went out into Lucy Hamilton's office.

She was still there, working at the filing cabinet. He said, "What's with you? You trying to set a record?"

She turned and gave him a grim look.

"No."

"When there's work, I finish it," she said stubbornly.

"Okay. I appreciate it. How about having dinner with me? A drink first, and then a two-pound lobster. How does that hit you?"

She closed the drawer of the filing cabinet. "I feel better already. Give me two little minutes to fix my face."

They dined leisurely and sumptuously at Bea Morley's famous *Mouse Trap* restaurant on Biscayne Boulevard. When they arrived at Lucy Hamilton's apartment building, she said, "Would you like to come up for a nightcap? Or a cup of my famous coffee?"

"Sure. Make it coffee."

In her apartment, Shayne took off his coat and stretched out on the comfortable divan while Lucy went into the kitchen to make the coffee. When she came into the living room she saw that Shayne was fast asleep. She stood there for several long moments looking down at Shayne's face with its ruggedly handsome features, shook her head in a gesture of disappointment and said, half

aloud, "My gay, vigorous Lothario." She bent down and kissed his forehead. "Good night, Sweet Prince," she whispered, and as she walked into her bedroom, added, "Good night, you rat!"

Shayne was awakened by the smell of frying bacon and eggs and the aroma of good coffee. He looked around the room, sat up, and rubbed the sleep from his eyes. He stood up then, stretched, and walked into the kitchen.

"Why didn't you wake me?" he asked.

"You were dreaming of Raquel Welsh. I thought I'd let you enjoy it. Do you want to shower first? There's a razor in the medicine chest."

"Sure. Be only a few minutes."

They ate and talked, finished, then drove to the office. Shortly after they arrived, Tim Rourke called.

"I've got the mug shot of Summers. I had the photo department blow up several pictures. The photo was taken when Summers was released a year ago so it's pretty recent. Unless the guy has disguised himself he should be easily recognized. He's no beauty. I've seen better faces on hogs. Shall I come over to your office or do you want to come over to mine?"

"Come here. I'm expecting some phone calls."

"Be there shortly."

Rourke arrived twenty minutes later, kissed Lucy on the cheek, and went into Shayne's office, laid down the envelope with the photos of Summers in it. Shayne took out the pictures and studied one.

"Do you, by some chance miracle, have this guy's criminal record?" Shayne asked.

"I don't work in hopes of miracles, pally. Just top-notch reporting. All the facts all the time." He withdrew a folded sheet from his inside jacket pocket and laid it on the desk. "It's a real beauty. This guy has spent half his life in the can."

Shayne studied the sheet. There were a score of arrests, mostly for suspicion of safe robbery, and three convictions. He had served eighteen years in three different prisons. He was forty years old, five feet ten inches tall, weighed a hundred and eighty, had a blunt nose, thick lips, and an underslung jaw.

"He doesn't look too bright," Shayne said. "Three convictions. He falls into traps easily. Now to find him."

"It's a big city," Rourke said. "May take weeks or months."

"People have health patterns, Tim. They also have

trend patterns. When this guy is free, according to the sheet, he frequents cocktail lounges, is known to drink a lot. We'll work the bars and cocktail lounges, and the motels on the Beach."

"Good. I'll work Miami. You work the Beach. When do we start?"

"I want to make a phone call first." He dialed Sherri Kremer's number. There was a brief wait and then her voice.

"Hello? This is Sherri Kremer."

"Miss Kremer, Mike Shayne. How are you?"

"Just fine. What can I do for you?"

"Do you happen to know when Velisha Gillette will return?"

"No, I don't. She didn't say."

"Would you be willing to call me when Miss Gillette returns?"

There was an awkward silence of a long minute. "Mr. Shayne, I really don't like to do that. I don't want to feel that I may be hurting her in some fashion."

"Miss Kremer, you would be doing her a favor. The sooner we clear up this matter the sooner the aura of suspicion of her would end. If she can satisfy me that she knows nothing of the robbery I would

relate that information to the police and she would be spared the embarrassment of being taken down to the detective bureau for questioning. If that happened, the newspaper boys would have a field day with her. She could go without that kind of publicity."

"Well, what is it you want of her?"

"Just to talk with her." Shayne gave her a telephone number. "If I'm not here you can tell my secretary."

"Very well. I shall tell Velisha that you called, and that you want to talk to her, and why. I owe her that much."

The click in his ear told him Sherri Kremer had hung up. He turned to Rourke. "Let's go. There's a guy out there who is marked for murder. We have to find him before the killers get to him first."

It was too early for the posh cocktail lounges in the hotels so Shayne made the rounds of the bars along Collins Avenue. He was known by the bartenders in most of them. In the others, he was met with blank stares and negative shakes of the head. He tried a little bribery.

"If this guy should happen to show and you call me I'll drop a century note in your hand."

A bartender in the Half Moon Bar on Collins Avenue

near the 79th Street Causeway was more friendly. "What's important about finding this guy?"

"I'm trying to save his life. Somebody wants to kill him."

"Is that so? Who?"

"*Somebody*. You want to earn that C-note, just call me." He handed him a card, turned and walked out.

Late that afternoon Shayne called his office and asked if there were any messages.

"Tim Rourke called. Wanted to know if you had learned anything. I told him I didn't think so because you hadn't phoned. He said he had a dry run, so far. He said to tell you he's staying with it and hopes you are too."

"Yeah, sure. Okay, Lucy. Don't hang around too long. Close up at five and go home. If there are any messages I'll pick them from the answering service."

"Okay, Michael. Good luck."

Shayne hung up, walked to his car, got in and drove to the line of hotels and motels along Collins Avenue. He tried the Carillon, and then a dozen more along the street until he reached the Thunderbird. He drew a blank at each place. It was eight o'clock when he left the last place.

He drove home. He heard



the phone ringing in his apartment as he inserted the key in the lock. He picked up the receiver as soon as he entered. It was Rourke.

"I think I've got a lead on our boy," Tim Rourke said. "He was in this bar on Miami Avenue a couple of nights ago. I know the bartender there. An ex-pug named Danny Malone. Malone recognized him, told me the guy drinks like a fish. He just sat there at the bar and guzzled rye like it was the last day it was going to be available. We stake it out, Mike. You and me, eh?"

"Sure, Tim. Tomorrow night. What's the name of the joint?"

"The Big Palm. Can't miss it. On Miami Avenue right off 2nd."

"Okay. Meet you there at eight tomorrow night." He hung up, poured himself two fingers of cognac, took off his

clothes and got into the shower. He let the hot water run over his big frame for several minutes then turned on the cold, rubbed himself briskly. He towed himself dry, got into a pair of pajamas and went to bed.

He was awakened by the incessant ringing of the telephone at nine o'clock in the morning. He picked up the receiver.

"Yeah. This is Shayne."

"Mr. Shayne. Sherri Kremer. Miss Gillette will be arriving today. The ship docked at eight o'clock. She should be home in the next hour or so. That's the information you wanted, wasn't it?" Her tone was cold and efficient.

"Yes, Miss Kremer. Thanks very much. I appreciate this."

VI

SHAYNE GOT out of bed, took a quick shower, dressed, made a cup of coffee, drank it down, and walked out, got into his car and drove toward the South Poinciana Apartments in Hollywood. The day was warm, traffic was light when he turned into Collins Avenue, and just as light when he reached Hallandale Beach Boulevard and Collins Avenue became South Ocean Drive.

It was only a short distance

from there to the South Poinciana Apartments. He glanced at his watch. Ten-thirty. Velisha Gillette should be home. He parked across the street from the building, decided to go in the back way and avoid the security guard. No one saw him enter. He strode up the stairs to the second floor, took the elevator, rode up to the seventh floor, got out and walked the short distance to apartment 7-D, pushed the bell. He waited. No answer.

Shayne pushed the bell again. Still no answer. The corridor was deserted. He took a ring of keys from his pocket, tried two. The third one worked. He opened the door and went in. No one was there. He went into Velisha Gillette's room, looked around, opened the drawers of the dressing table. In the bottom lefthand drawer there was a letter addressed to Velisha. The return address was written in an almost illegible scrawl. "Anna Grabowski, 438 Ninth Street, Scranton, Pennsylvania." He wrote down the address in a notebook, took out the letter and read it. One paragraph stimulated his senses.

If the package comes I will put it away like you asked and hold it for you until you come. Your father and me we are very anxious to see you. It has been

almost a year since we saw you last. Please come soon.

The big detective folded the letter back into the envelope and walked into the living room, threw his Panama on a divan against the far wall and sat down to wait. Unless he was as far off-base as the distance to China, those bonds would be in the package Velisha Gillette was sending or had already sent to her parents' home.

Sending the bonds there would be a perfect hiding place, if she could talk Bruce Wayne into letting her do it. After that? Well, perhaps Velisha was planning the old double-cross, take the bonds and depart for destinations unknown. He didn't put that past her, nor did he believe that Velisha didn't have a hand in Joe Ross' murder. He was anxious to meet this doll, very, very anxious.

He didn't have long to wait. About twenty minutes later, there was the sound of a key being placed in the lock of the door. The door opened and the most striking blonde Shayne had seen in a month of Sundays came in. She was carrying a small expensive bag. She set the bag down and regarded Shayne coolly. Shayne looked back with an expression of admiration and pleasure.

"Dr. Livingston, I presume,"

Velisha Gillette said, and drew off a pair of white gloves. "Now, will you please tell me what the hell you are doing in my apartment, and how you got in here?"

"My name's Mike Shayne. I'm —"

"Yes, I gathered as much. A private investigator. Sherri told me all that on the phone this morning. You haven't answered my question. I believe there's something in the books about breaking and entering? Does your license give you the right to enter people's apartments without permission?"

"I hate to sit in lobbies, Miss Gillette. I didn't think you'd mind since you and I are going to be real chummy."

"I'd prefer a rattlesnake."

She removed her jacket, placed it carefully over a chair across the room, turned to him. She was as calm as a twilight breeze over the water of the Atlantic visible from the apartment. Shayne studied her.

Her long blonde hair rippled around her shoulders and hung in loose waves down her back. The blue eyes were faintly shadowed with a deeper shade of blue that enhanced their color. The lips were sensual. Her figure was something no woman had a right to own. She knew it, too. The high breasts jutted impudently. Her small-

boned face was tanned to a golden hue. The long, shapely legs were bare and smooth, evenly tanned to the same shade as her face, and the slender ankles ran smoothly into perfectly formed feet that were encased into a pair of open-toed blue shoes that must have set her back a hundred or more.

Everything about her screamed money, but more than that, she radiated sex in a way that hit Shayne with the brute force of a solar plexus wallop. He understood more clearly now how and why any man would steal or even kill to possess her. That was her exterior. What was inside of her, inside the heart and the spirit, was very much unknown to him at the moment. All he could do was guess. Shayne's guess was that she was playing with a stacked deck.

The anger and antagonism went from her eyes and manner suddenly.

She said, "All right, now that we've finished with the small talk, maybe we can get to the nitty gritty."

Shayne stood up, grinned. "I like you much better this way. Don't get me wrong. I find you attractive, exciting, even when you're mad. However, I'll forgo the personal aspect for the real purpose of my visit. Two

million dollars in bearer bonds."

"That's a lovely sum," she said. "Whoever has it must be very happy. You're asking me if I have them?"

"That's direct enough. Do you?"

"No, I don't. Mr. Shayne, in the past three years or so I have been able to live as if I had two million dollars. In a way, I suppose I do. I have seen looks in men's eyes that told me I could have everything they possess if they could possess everything I have. Is that plain enough?"

"I'd never argue the point. Next question. Are you willing to keep on trading that until the market for a fading commodity fades?"

She gave him a wry smile. "You're saying, in part, that I might have bought myself a little insurance against that by arranging the theft of the bonds. Isn't that it?"

Shayne tilted his head to one side, looked at her with a measure of appreciation. He began to wonder if he wasn't wrong as hell about her involvement in the theft. Or, perhaps she was smart enough to have pulled it off, arranged it so cleverly that all suspicion of her would be completely diverted. He said, "You're blocking all my punches,

Velisha—I may call you that?"

"Sure, Mike. Why not? I see no reason why we can't be friends." She turned from him and walked across the room, turned and faced him. "I'm not really blocking your punches, as you put it. I merely see no purpose in being coy. I'm a realist. You're here investigating the robbery of those bonds. You want to know if I can help you to find them. Perhaps, if Bruce Wayne took them, confided in me. Is there a reward for the recovery of the bonds? Would I be interested in the reward?"

"Ten per cent, Velisha. Two hundred thousand dollars. Could you manage to live on that for a while?"

"Quite handsomely. The amount intrigues me."

"As much as two million?"

She smiled. "Not nearly as much. Unfortunately, I don't have the two million nor, at the moment, the vaguest idea how I can earn the two hundred thousand. So, where does that leave us, Mike?"

"I'll ask you a hypothetical question. "You've been with Bruce Wayne for some time. He spends a lot of money. He gambles for large sums, so far as I know, beyond his income. Knowing him as you do, would you say he is capable of having engineered this robbery in order

to maintain his style of living?"

She was thoughtful for several seconds. "I don't know. I don't care to pass judgment on Bruce. I don't know that he is or is not living beyond his income. I do know he is the head of a finance company. Finance? That means money. How much I don't know. That's all I can tell you, or that's all I am willing to tell you."

"Do you know that the original investment in Gulfstream was put up by Mrs. Wayne?"

"No, I don't, and I don't care. Mike, I grew up poor as hell. I left home when I was sixteen. I discovered I had a taste for the finer things in life. I wanted to be waited on, catered to, wear good clothes, travel, stay in the best hotels, have an apartment like this to come home to. Sex? Bruce Wayne is an attractive man. I don't find him repulsive. As a matter of fact, I enjoy making love with him."

"He's more than twice your age."

"True. It's one of his attractions. Twice my experience. He's taught me how to live, how to enjoy life. Take you, for instance. You look just like your description Sherri gave me. Big. Gross red hair. Hard. Tough. Unavailable. That interests me."

"I'm flattered."

"Maybe. You don't fool me for a single second. I doubt that you're as unavailable as you seem. If I half tried I think I could make you turn somersaults."

Shayne grinned. "Why not give it the old college try? Maybe I'll also do card tricks."

Velisha came close to him. "Like I said, I'm a realist. I like to get things done that have to be done."

"Yes, I can imagine."

"So, why don't we get the thing done?" Her arms around his neck and her full firm breasts pressed against his chest. Her mouth touched the edge of his jaw and then brushed against his ear.

He said, "Why did you kill Joe Ross?"

She stepped back. The fire had gone out of her eyes and was replaced with something cold.

"You hit low punches, don't you?" she said evenly. "Well, it's not a bruise I'll carry to my grave. I just thought that this time I would enjoy being a woman with the right man. You're not the right man, are you, Mike?"

"Are you the right woman, Velisha? Taking you would be one helluva pleasure, the way I see you. But the idea that you are involved in this robbery

that's going to cost a lot of people money they can't afford to lose, and worse yet, a murder rap, kills off all your appeal. I'm going to tail you, or have you tailed, every minute until I recover those bonds and until I find out who killed that schnook Joe Ross. Frankly, I think I'm looking at her."

Velisha's eyes turned dark and her mouth twisted. "Get out of here, you bastard! Get out! Get out!"

Shayne picked up his Panama. "Like I said, Baby, you and I are going to get real chummy. You'll see me wherever you go, whatever you do. So, if you're real smart, as smart as you think you are, you'll play it my way."

She went to the door and opened it, stood there ablaze with fury. "Get out, you bastard!" Her voice turned shrill. "You're not going to tail me. I'll see to that!"

Shayne stopped in front of her. "You shouldn't shout like that. What will the neighbors think?" He gave her cheek a quick pat and walked out. The door slammed shut behind him.

VII

SHAYNE DROVE to Bal Harbour. On the way he thought that so far he had come up with a big fat zero.

Pressuring Velisha Gillette had been a total loss. She wouldn't give a cop the time of day. One thought stuck in his mind, Velisha's romantic play for him. Why? Did she make it in an effort to win him over, to have him drop any investigation of her? He didn't flatter himself on the fact that he could turn on a girl like her so quickly, especially after she had returned from a vacation with a lover.

He shook his head. That didn't make sense. More and more he turned to the belief that she was deeply involved. How to prove it? If she had a hand in the killing of Ross then where was the gun? True, he hadn't given her room or the apartment a thorough shake. Would she be stupid enough to keep the murder weapon there? She was too smart for that, he believed.

She was a cool cookie. Smooth. No sign of any kind that might have betrayed her. Any other woman, especially that young, would have been caught in a paralysis of blind panic at being confronted by a cop or private investigator searching for evidence to the robbery and murder.

Shayne's mind went back to the letter from her mother and the mention of the package. He shook his head. Too obvious.

Too amateurish. Well, what the hell was she but one more amateur?

He drove to the Wayne residence, parked in the driveway, mounted the steps to the front door and rang the bell. A minute later a maid in a white uniform answered the ring.

"I'm Mike Shayne. I'd like to see Mrs. Wayne."

"Is she expecting you, sir?"

"She is."

"Come in. Please wait here."

The maid disappeared into a long corridor and turned right. She came back a moment later. "This way, please. In that room, the library."

"Thanks." He found Cynthia Wayne waiting in the library.

"Please come in, Mr. Shayne. Sit there, won't you?" She pointed to a large armchair.

She sat down on a divan opposite him.

"My husband is back," she said dully. "Did you know that?"

"Yes. So is Miss Gillette. I spoke to her. Is your husband here?"

"No, at his office. He phoned me from there. I suppose I should ask you what you've learned about Miss Gillette," she said flatly. The emotion in her voice was underneath, submerged just below the surface. That was a part of her breeding. She

wouldn't expose the naked feeling of her hurt.

"You want the truth, Mrs. Wayne?"

"That's all I'm interested in."

"Your husband has been keeping Velisha Gillette for more than a year, pays her rent, buys her clothes, expensive pieces of jewelry. My feeling is that she is involved in the robbery. I have the same feeling about your husband."

"I don't want to believe it. May I ask why you have formed this opinion?"

"A hunch, partly. More, however, on how Miss Gillette reacted to my questioning. Don't get me wrong. She admitted nothing. She is a very shrewd young woman."

"Her kind generally are. And you formed your opinion about my husband on that basis too? Am I to accept that?"

Shayne nodded. "It's not an established fact, of course. But all the elements are there. Opportunity, motivation, the influence of—"

"A very attractive young woman, Mr. Shayne?"

"Correct. There's one other thing."

"Yes, Mr. Shayne?"

"The murder of an ex-convict who may have committed the actual robbery."

"My God, no!" Her face

turned pale. "You aren't suggesting that my husband is involved in a murder, are you?"

"I'm sorry, but it looks that way."

She rose from the divan, clasped her hands together.

"No," she said in a loud voice. "Theft, yes. Murder, no. Never! Mr. Shayne, you must be mistaken. You must be."

"I hope I am, for your sake. The police are investigation that angle. The dead man had five of the bearer bonds on his person when he was discovered in a field. He was killed, according to the coroner's report, the day your husband and Miss Gillette left for Paradise Island."

"Then he couldn't have done it. Doesn't that explain it?" There was a frantic pleading in her voice.

"The ship on which your husband and Miss Gillette sailed left at five o'clock. Joe Ross, was killed earlier that day. The police theory is that Ross was hit to silence him, that he was hired by your husband to commit the robbery, that only a part of those bonds, a very small portion, were left in the safe, the rest removed by your husband before the robbery."

She strode across the room and back. "It's just a theory, you said. There is no evidence. That's so, isn't it?"

"Let's call it circumstantial.

It's the best kind of evidence. There is another man involved in this. If the police find him and he confesses to the crime, implicates your husband, in the robbery, at least, it will make a case."

She put both her hands to her face, bent her head. She faced Shayne after several long moments. "You must prove my husband innocent, whatever the cost."

"Of the robbery and murder, Mrs. Wayne?"

"At any cost. I know what I said to you before about my marriage. But I'm still his wife. He's been exceedingly cruel to me by his conduct but—yes, God help me, I still love him. I may divorce him when it's over but I must stand by him now."

Shayne rose. "If he is innocent, I shall do everything I can to prove it. If he isn't, it won't be up to me."

Mrs. Wayne nodded.

"I understand," she said, her voice dead. "I'll give you a signed blank check, Mr. Shayne. You can fill it in for any amount you say."

"That won't be necessary, Mrs. Wayne. I'll send you a bill." Shayne nodded to her, turned and went out, got into his car and drove to his office.

Lucy Hamilton said, "Mr. Reed called. He said he'd like you to call him back. Will



Gentry called, too. Same thing. Wants you to call him back."

"Okay. Get Mr. Reed first." He went into his office. His phone rang. Lucy said, "Mr. Reed on line two."

Shayne pushed a button, picked up the phone. "Mike Shayne, Mr. Reed."

"I just wanted to know how things are going, Mr. Shayne? Can you tell me anything?"

"A little. There's a connection between that man the police found in a field, Joe Ross, and the robbery. He had a partner, a guy named Bob Summers. We've got a line on him. I think I'll get to him tonight. He just may break this case wide open."

"What about Bruce Wayne? Anything to connect him with the robbery?"

"There's some circumstantial

evidence. Pieces. They may fit together after I get some of the missing parts. If they fit in, we'll have the whole picture. My thinking is that he's involved up to his ears."

"I believed that from the first. I'm very sorry for Mrs. Wayne. She's a fine woman. Well, that's not my problem, nor yours. My job is to protect the investors. How close are you to locating the bonds? Or is it too soon to ask?"

"It is. I can't tell you any more than I have. I'm staying on this exclusive of everything else. I feel I'll find the bonds. A hunch, no more than that."

"Very well, Mr. Shayne. You'll get in touch with me if something should develop?"

"Of course. Thanks for calling." The redhead hung up. He pressed the intercom button. "Lucy, get me Will Gentry."

Shayne's phone rang a minute later. It was Lucy. "Gentry on line one."

"Thanks, Lucy." He picked up the phone. "Will? You called me."

"Yeah, Mike. This Gillette woman. What you have you got on her?"

"Will, there's something I think you should look into. Velisha Gillette wrote her mother she was sending her a package and instructed her to

hold it until she came to town."

"Town? What town?"

"Scranton, Pennsylvania. The mother's name is Anna Grabowski. Lives at 438 Ninth Street. The package may have already arrived there. It may hold those bonds. Just a hunch, Will."

"A damn good one. I'll have the police there check it out. Anything else?"

"That's it for now. I may have a little more after tonight."

"Don't make me call you. You call me."

"Okay, Will."

Late that afternoon, Will Gentry called. "I got a report from the police in Scranton. You know what that package contained?"

"You're asking me? I'm to give you a wild guess?"

Gentry growled. "That package contained a set of silver, a gift to Miss Gillette's parents on their twenty-fifth anniversary which is the eighth of next month. Well, we spoiled that surprise. Any more ideas?"

"I'll think up a couple."

"Don't strain yourself. Just get me some facts. Good-by."

VIII

MIKE SHAYNE thought deeply after he hung up. Why would Velisha mail the silver to

her parents if she were coming in to help them celebrate their anniversary? Why not bring the silver with her? Something was hidden in that. But what?

A dozen different thoughts came to him. He discarded one after another. She was tricky. That gift of silver was a Trojan horse. It had to be. She had left home at sixteen, and, from what he had learned from Sherri Kremer, Velisha had not been in touch with her parents for a long time. Why now? The anniversary? He doubted it. Velisha didn't strike him as being a sentimental type.

Shayne rose from the chair, stretched, glanced at his watch. He had time. Two more hours. He went out, got into his car and drove to a restaurant near the Columbus Hotel. He had a double brandy, a steak and salad, finished it with another brandy. It was seven-thirty when he got to the bar on Miami Avenue. He saw Tim Rourke sitting on a stool at the far end of the long bar. He walked over, took the empty stool next to Rourke.

"Summers hasn't shown yet?" he said.

"Not yet," Rourke replied. "It's early."

The bartender came over to them.

Rourke said, "Danny, this is Mike Shayne, my pal. Mike,

shake hands with Danny Malone."

Shayne shook hands with Malone. "I saw you fight Pete Driscoll, Danny. You really worked him over that night."

"A long time ago, Mr. Shayne. What's your pleasure?"

"Cognac. Better fill Rourke's glass, too."

The bartender poured the drinks. "You guys still looking for this Summers character?"

"Yeah," Shayne replied. "He comes in here regularly?"

"On and off. If it will help you, I found out where he lives. It's the Four Palms Motel. Around the corner."

"That will help, Danny," Shayne said. "It'll save us a lot of time." He put a twenty on the bar. "That's for you."

Malone pocketed the bill. "I don't want anybody to know I gave you this information. The boss wouldn't like it. A lot of characters come in here. Understand?"

"Sure, Danny. Don't worry about it."

"That's fine."

Rourke said, "You know me, Danny. No one gets any information from me. Mike is like that, too. And if your boss should get outta line with you, just let me know. I know a helluva lot about him."

Malone set two glasses down on the bar, poured a brandy

and a Scotch. "On the house."

After Malone walked away, Shayne said, "Do we wait here or do I go looking for Summers at the Four Palms?"

"Let's wait a little longer. Besides, we have these drinks to finish. Never waste good liquor. If he doesn't show here, you want to go to the Four Palms alone?"

"I think it would best. I'll use my best convincing manner on him to make him talk."

Rourke laughed. "Like what? Like making him an offer he can't refuse?"

"That line is worn out, Timothy. 'The Godfather' killed it."

"Yeah. Okay, let's give him another hour."

"Suits me fine."

The hour went by and Summers didn't show. Shayne stood up. "I think I'll go over to the Four Palms. You going to stick around?"

"Will you need me?"

"Nope."

"Then I'll go home. Call me there if you learn anything."

"Will do."

Shayne went out, walked around to the Four Palms, went into the lobby. The desk clerk was a middle-aged man with a bald head, a full mustache, and watery eyes. He looked up as Mike Shayne came in.

"A room, sir?"

"No. I'm looking for a friend of mine. Mr. Summers."

"Mr. Summers? Room 204. I'll ring him."

"No, don't do that," Shayne said, and smiled. "I want to surprise him. We haven't seen each other in some time. It'll be better that way." He handed the clerk a dollar bill. "Thanks."

"Thank you. You can take the stairs if you want. The room is at the head of the stairs."

"Sure, thanks again."

Shayne took the stairs, found room 204, knocked on the door.

A thick voice answered. "Who is it?"

"My name's Mike Shayne. I'm a friend of Joe Ross. I want to talk to you."

There was a long silence, then, "I don't know you. How come you knew Ross?"

"I pulled time with him in Michigan. No use talking through this door. Let me in and I'll give you the facts."

There was another long wait then the door opened. Shayne pushed his way in, shoved Summers back, and closed the door.

"What the hell is this?" Summers asked. "Who the hell are you, anyway?"

"A private investigator. You're in trouble, Summers."

Very big trouble. If you're smart, real smart, you'll answer my questions."

"I don't answer questions from cops, or private eyes. Get the hell outta here!" He turned away from Shayne.

"You're marked for murder, Summers. You're going to get it just like Ross got it. It's only a matter of time. You know too much."

"I don't know nothin'!"

"The Gulfstream Finance robbery, Summers. That was you. You and Ross. Ross was knocked off first because they got to him first. You're next."

"I don't know nothin' about no robbery. You're barking up the wrong tree."

"Like hell. Ross had five of the bearer bonds on him when they found him, stiff as a board. How many of those bonds have you got stashed around here?"

Terror, stark, naked terror, and hate burned on Summers' face and was caught up in an inbred sneer. He swept a hand in a half arc. "Who the hell you kiddin'? You ain't talkin' to no punk. I been around. I know the score!"

"You not only don't know the score but in this instance you don't even know the game!"

Summers worked up a mouthful of saliva and spat it at

Shayne's feet. "That's my answer, Shamus. You think you got something on me, pull me in."

"You've got your brains where you sit, Summers. Knowing your record, I'm not surprised. You are a punk. This was the biggest score you ever pulled off only you didn't get the two million. All you got was a small piece of it. Figure it out. You were set up. A few bonds were left for you and Ross. The rest were removed. Isn't that how it happened?"

"You're a damned liar! Let me tell you something. Even if I did pull that caper I sure as hell wouldn't spill my guts about it. I don't talk myself into the can, see?"

"You did a pretty good job of it in some manner. You're a three-time loser. They don't use the Habitual Criminal Act anymore but I'll tell you this much, the kind of pressure that will go against you will get you a life bit anyway. Unless you cooperate."

Summers sneered. "Cooperate? You must be nuts! I'm no fink. If I was beat, I'll handle it myself, see? I'll get what's coming to me."

"Sure, a shot in the back of the head. Just like Ross got it. You just told me you were in on the robbery. If I shake this room down, I'll find some of

those bonds. That's all it will take."

Summers moved clumsily toward Shayne and swung a right. The blow caught Shayne on the shoulder. The big redhead backhanded Summers across the mouth, grabbed a handful of his shirt, pulled him closer with a rough yank, belted him with a hard right to the belly, then cuffed Summers across the face several times. He let him go with a hard push.

"That was for thinking you're tough, you lousy punk. You know what? I'm going to take you in. I'm going to let some of those hard-nosed Miami fuzz work you over a little, which is what you deserve."

"They can kill me. I ain't gonna talk."

"They won't have to. If you put up bail and are out on the street you're dead. However, what those fuzz may do is beat some sense into your stupid head. Frankly, I care less than a damn about what happened to Ross or what's going to happen to you. What I care about is three thousand widows, secretaries, aging school teachers, and a slew of old people who stand to lose half their invested savings because of you and that rat Wayne. You can save yourself from spending the rest of your

life behind bars, if you are smart. If you are, you may get off with two years. With good time off, you'll be on the street again in about eighteen months. Think about that?"

The ex-con was beginning to waver. Shayne had dealt too long with people and motives not to feel that he was getting to Summers.

"How do I know you're leveling with me?" Summers asked. "How do I know you got enough weight down at headquarters to get me any immunity?"

"I didn't say I'd get you immunity. I said you might get off with about two years. I'll try to convince the fuzz and the D.A. you should get it. The rest will be up to them. You can help solve a two million dollar robbery and a murder. That should carry a lot of weight."

"I don't know who killed Ross."

"I'll buy that. You could hazard a helluva guess. Now, how many of those bonds were in the safe that you and Ross split?"

"Twenty grand. Forty bonds of five-hundred denomination. We split it down the middle. Ten grand apiece."

"You got any of those bonds around here?"

"Yeah. Eight grand worth."

"Get them."

"I need a drink. Get me a drink first."

"I'll get you a whole bottle. Is there a liquor store around here?"

"In the bar around the corner. The bartender's name is Danny Malone. You call him. He'll send it up."

"What's the number?"

Summers gave it to him. Shayne picked up the phone and called the desk. Gave the clerk the number. Danny Malone answered.

"Can you send a bottle of rye up to room 204 in the Four Palms?"

"Canadian Club okay?"

"Yeah; sure."

"Right away. Mr. Shayne?"

"Yeah."

"Everything working out?"

"Sure. Thanks." He hung up, turned to Summers. "In a minute. Now, get the bonds."

Summers went to the bed, raised the mattress, ripped out a hole, stuck in his hand and took out a large envelope. He handed it to Shayne. "There's sixteen bonds there. Eight grand. How will I make bail if you take those?"

"Take my advice. You don't want to make bail. You'll be a lot safer in jail. This is the smartest move you ever made. I'm going to keep my word with you. I'll do everything I can to get you a break. Now,



tell me who set up this robbery?"

"Joe Ross got the proposition from a dame. He said she was a real looker. A blonde. Young. That's all I know."

"You never met this woman yourself?"

"No. Never."

"Where did Ross meet her?"

"In a bar. Across the street from the Diplomat Hotel. That's in Hollywood."

"I know the place. How was the robbery setup made?"

"She told Ross there were a lot of negotiable bonds in the safe. There would be no one in the office after five o'clock. No security officer checking the offices or anything. The build-

ing was open until about seven. She described the safe to Ross. He told me about it. It sounded easy. A drill job. The whole thing didn't take more than half an hour."

"Did she say why she wanted Ross to rob the safe?"

"He didn't mention it."

"Weren't you curious about that?"

"I figured the guy who owned the joint was in some kind of money trouble and wanted the place taken to cover up losses, or maybe he had taken some of the stuff out himself and blew it. I did a few capers like that before."

"You figured right."

There was a knock on the door then. Shayne opened it. An elderly guy was there with the bottle. Shayne handed him ten dollars.

"Keep it," Shayne said. "Buy yourself a drink."

"Gee, thanks, Mister. Thanks very much."

"Sure," Shayne said, and closed the door. He handed the bottle to Summers. "Be my guest."

Summers took the bottle, got a water glass from the dresser and poured the glass almost to the rim, drank it down in two gulps. He turned to Shayne. "What happens now?"

"I'm going to have you

taken in. We'll go from there."

"Not yet, please. Give me a little more time. I'll need a few more belts from that bottle."

"Go ahead. Be my guest."

Summers poured the glass full again, drank half of it down in a gulp. Shayne knew that so far there was no case. If Summers told the truth, and there was no reason to doubt him, no jury would be willing to convict Wayne and Velisha Gillette on his testimony. There had to be corroboration or sufficient circumstantial evidence to tie it all in together. The murder weapon had to be found and put into the killer's hands. That would be either Wayne or Velisha. He turned to Summers.

"Where did you cash the two thousand dollars worth of bonds?"

"In four different banks."

"Which banks?"

"I got it written down." He took a wallet from his rear pocket and extracted a slip of paper. "The banks was in Miami Beach, Fort Lauderdale, Hallandale, and Coral Gables."

"Which banks?"

"I didn't write that down. I figured I wouldn't go back to them towns."

"No one questioned you in any of the banks?"

"Nobody. I saw the manager or the assistant manager, told

them I wanted to cash a bond, put it down, and they wrote out some figures and then gave me the money. That's all there was to it."

Shayne nodded. "Sure, just as easy as that." The thought hit him then that Wayne, in need of money to meet his gambling losses, must have done the same thing. Then, too, Valisha was an expensive dish. A steady diet of her would break a richer man than Wayne.

Summers had another drink, turned to Shayne. "Okay. I'm ready, if you are."

Shayne picked up the phone. The clerk answered. Shayne gave him the number of Miami Police Headquarters. An officer in the Control Room answered. Shayne asked if Will Gentry was in.

"No, sir. Gone for the day."

"How about Detective Len Sturgis?"

"He's on. I'll connect you."

There was a short wait, then Sturgis' crisp voice barked, "Yeah, Detective Sturgis. Criminal Investigation."

"This is Mike Shayne, Len."

"So? What are you up to now?"

"I'm at the Four Palms Motel. You know the place?"

"Is this a quiz program or are you about to tell me something?"

"Room 204. I'm with one of

the men who was involved in the Gulfstream Finance robbery. Name's Summers."

"The hell you say!"

"I have in my possession eight thousand dollars of the bonds taken in the robbery. Summers is willing to cooperate. You can come and pick him up."

"Be right there."

"You won't get upset if I call Will Gentry, will you? I said I'd call him if anything broke."

"I can do it faster from here. Never mind. Go ahead and call him. You need any help there?"

"Nope. Everything in order. No need of sirens, Len. Just come quietly and take Summers with you."

There was an edge to Sturgis' voice. "Yeah, yeah, sure. I'll do it your way, *Commissioner*." The receiver slammed down. Shayne grinned and rubbed his ear.

Sturgis knocked on the door ten minutes later. Shayne opened the door. Sturgis strode in, looked from Shayne to Summers. He took out a pair of handcuffs. "Police regulations, Summers. I'll put 'em on loose. Hold out your hands."

Sturgis turned to Shayne. "I have to hand it to you this time. You really get around, don't you? Where's the bonds?"

Shayne handed him the sheaf of bonds. Sturgis counted

them, took out a notebook, wrote out a receipt, handed it to Shayne.

"All according to regulations," Sturgis said, "And now, if it won't inconvenience you too much, I think the D.A. would like the pleasure of your company at this time. Will you condescend to ride in the police car or must you ride in that status wagon you own?"

"My pleasure, Mr. Sturgis. Let's go."

Sturgis made a wry face, nodded to Summers. "Okay, Summers. You first."

Shayne said, "Police regulations, Summers, you know."

"Sure," Summers said. "I've been in these marches before."

IX

SUMMERS WAS booked and put into a cell. Sturgis and Shayne went into the office of Assistant District Attorney George BeGole. BeGole shook hands with Shayne.

"Haven't seen you around for a while," BeGole said. "Are you being arrested?" He grinned.

Sturgis grimaced. "Mr. Shayne," he accented the *Mister*, has favored us by locating one of the robbers involved in the Gulfstream robbery. Name of Robert Summers. An ex-con. He's in a

cell. I thought you'd like to talk to Shayne, seeing as how he located the suspect."

"I've been informed that you were engaged by the Investors Guild to locate the bonds," BeGole said.

"I have sixteen of those bonds here," Sturgis said. He handed the sheaf of bonds to BeGole, who counted them and marked them as evidence and noted that it was done in the presence of Detective Len Sturgis and Private Investigator Michael Shayne. He turned to Shayne.

"Is there something you want to fill me in on, Mike?"

"Summers is willing to cooperate. I said I would speak to you about giving him a break if he went along. Joe Ross, the man who was slain and had the five bonds on his person, was his partner on the job. According to his story, Ross was approached by a woman, young, blonde, good-looking, who propositioned Ross to rob the safe. Summers personally never met or saw the woman, couldn't identify her."

BeGole shook his head. "Pretty weak so far. Do you know the identity of the woman?"

"It's a guess. But I'm almost sure it is Bruce Wayne's current flame, Velisha Gillette. She's a real looker. Sharp. Street wise.

Been on her own since she was sixteen. Lives in the South Poiciana Apartments in Hollywood. Apartment 7-D."

BeGole said, "Put her under surveillance, Len."

"I'd rather you didn't do that just yet, George. I—" Shayne began.

Sturgis broke in. "Look, Shayne, I don't know who the hell you think you are but this is police business!"

"Wait a minute, Len. Let's hear what Mike has to say about it. Go ahead, Mike."

"I've got a hunch I can find those bonds. That's all I'm concerned about, what I was engaged to do. Give me two days. If I don't find the bonds by then I'll give you all I've got and you can take it from there."

"I'd damn well like to have all you've got right now!" Sturgis declared. "If you're holding anything back we should know I'll tie you into knots. There's a homicide involved, too. Or have you let that slip your mind?"

"I haven't let anything slip my mind," Shayne retorted harshly. "You've let the fact slip your mind that I found Summers and that I induced him to cooperate. I didn't bring him in. I called you so you could bring him in. I'm not looking for glory, or to take

anything away from the department."

"Will Gentry may give you all the concessions you want all the time. I won't. You have some additional information, or evidence, I want it. Not two days later but now!"

"All I have is a hunch. I'm not giving you that. You're a great stickler for regulations, so check your manual."

He turned to BeGole. "Do I get those two days, George, or don't I?"

"I'm sorry, Mike, but that's up to Sturgis. Personally, I would say yes."

"Ah, hell!" Sturgis exploded. "Take the damn two days. We've got a dozen men working on the robbery. They may come in with a solution before you do. We've got some pretty hot leads. Leads, not hunches. Did you call the Chief?"

"Yes. He said it wasn't necessary for him to come down. He'd go over the Summers confession with you tomorrow."

BeGole said, "Bring Summers into my office, Len. I'll get a stenographer and we'll take his statement now before he changes his mind. Anything else between you two?"

"Nope," Shayne said. "All I wanted was the two days."

"I've got nothing more,"

Sturgis said. "You can go, Shayne."

"How about having someone drive me back to my car?"

"Come on. I'll get you somebody."

When Shayne got home he phoned Tim Rourke and gave him a rundown on what had transpired. Rourke was jubilant.

"Good! I'll have my story in the *news* before the boys on the *Herald* get wise. An exclusive. I'm going to get over right now and talk with BeGole and Sturgis. I'll try for an interview with Summers."

"Sturgis won't let you get within a mile of Summers. Forget it."

"Not me, pally. I've got ways. I'll see you." He hung up.

The redhead undressed and went to bed.

Shayne was up early the next morning, showered, dressed, drank two cups of coffee and drove out to Hialeah. He was following a strong hunch. Bruce Wayne must have been digging into those bearer bonds for some time. If so, then he cashed them in the same way that Summers had cashed them, in small banks outside the City of Miami area. If he could get that information he could then prove that Wayne had lied about the robbery.

The first two banks Shayne

visited in Hialeah had no record of anyone cashing any bearer bonds in the past two years. In the third bank he hit pay dirt. The manager recalled two transactions.

"Do you know what the amounts were?" Shayne asked.

"I'll check the records." He took a book from a drawer of the desk, flipped through some pages. The last one was four months ago, in June. Ten thousand dollars."

"Can you remember the man who chased them, his description?"

"I think so." He described Bruce Wayne accurately.

"Would you be able to identify him in court if it were necessary?"

"In court?"

"Yes. You're aware of the fact, aren't you, Mr. Taylor, that the Gulfstream Finance Company was robbed of two million dollars in bearer bonds of the type you cashed?"

"Yes, of course, but that was only several days ago. I'm talking about a transaction that occurred four months ago."

"Yes, I know. Now, when was the first transaction?"

The manager flipped over several pages. "In January of this year. Fifteen thousand dollars."

"How was the transaction

handled? I mean, by check or cash?"

"By check. Cashier's check."

"There was an endorsement of both checks?"

"Of course."

"Can you give me photostatic copies of those checks?"

"For what purpose, Mr. Shayne?"

"There is strong evidence that Bruce Wayne, the man you described to me as having cashed those bonds, president of Gulfstream Finance, staged a fake robbery of the company. He reported the entire two million dollars in bonds as being stolen. The fact that he cashed a total of twenty-five thousand dollars of those bonds in your bank indicates strongly that he was embezzling. When he got in too deep he staged the fake robbery."

"Do you represent the insurance company, Mr. Shayne?"

"No, Investors Guild. They'll appreciate your cooperation."

"I'm familiar with the Guild and Mr. Reed. Well, in that case, of course. I'll get you photostatic copies of both checks."

"Front and back."

"Yes, of course."

The manager returned about twenty minutes later and handed Shayne two photostatic copies. Both checks were made

out to Benjamin Woods and so endorsed. Shayne grunted. B.W Bruce Wayne. The mark of the amateur, using a name with the same initials as his right name. He rose, extended his hand.

"You've been very helpful, Mr. Taylor. I'm grateful."

"Do you think I may have to appear in court?"

"Quite likely. You won't mind?"

"It's my duty, Mr. Shayne. I'll be available."

Shayne drove to Opa-Locka and drew a blank in two banks. He then drove to Boca Raton, where he hit pay dirt again in two banks, and the sum total of the bonds cashed grew to sixty-five thousand dollars. He drove to Palm Beach. There, Bruce Wayne went wild. In three banks he cashed a total of ninety thousand dollars in a little more than a year. The total now was one hundred and fifty-five thousand dollars. He had ten photostatic copies of the checks issued in the transactions. He felt sure there would be more if he continued but he had enough, enough to send Bruce Wayne to prison for embezzlement, and possibly for falsely reporting a crime and for murder.

There were two things remaining. The whereabouts of the stolen bonds and the murder weapon. He drove back

to Miami. It was four o'clock when he drew up in the parking lot outside the building that housed the office of Gulfstream Finance. He saw Bruce Wayne's Cadillac parked in one of the reserved lanes.

Shayne didn't believe it was possible that Wayne would have the murder gun in the car. He was as sure as he had ever been about anything that Wayne killed Joe Ross. The more he had thought about it as he drove from Palm Beach the more he was convinced of it. He tried the doors of the Cadillac. Locked. He tried several master keys. One of them worked. He got into the car, looked in the glove compartment. Nothing. He checked underneath the dashboard. Still nothing. He bent down and groped under the front seat. Near the passenger side he felt something metallic and hard. His nerves jumped. He took out the handkerchief from the breast pocket pocket of his jacket, reached under the seat and drew out a .32 caliber pistol.

"I'll be damned!" he muttered aloud. "An amateur all the way." He wrapped the weapon carefully in the handkerchief and put it in his jacket pocket, got out of the car and closed the door. He went into the building, found a row of telephone booths, entered one

and dialed Will Gentry's number. The Chief answered.

"Shayne, Will. We're getting hot. Check out the registration of a .32 caliber S & W pistol." He gave Gentry the serial number. "I suggest you look under Bruce Wayne for the registration."

"Will do. Hang on."

Gentry was on the phone again in a short time. "Checks out. You got the gun?"

"Yes. Found it in Wayne's car."

"Bring it in. We'll have it tested against the slug taken from Ross' neck."

"Give me a little time, Will. I may wrap this up for you in the next hour. I've got to find the rest of those bonds."

"Okay. If Wayne is our boy, I don't think he's going any place. He must be cocky enough to believe we'll never make him on either the robbery or the murder."

"Oh, we've got him on the robbery. Dead bang!"

"On evidence?" Summers' confession isn't worth the paper it's written on without corroboration."

"Evidence, Will. Air tight. I'll be in touch shortly. Wait for me."

"I won't budge until I hear from you."

Shayne hung up and went out to check if Wayne's car was

still parked in its reserved lane. It was. He went into the building, took the elevator to the fifth floor, found the suite of offices with the legend on the glass doors—*Gulfstream Finance Corp.*

Mike Shayne went in.

The secretary-receptionist was a looker. Her blue-black hair, dark eyes, olive skin and figure that screamed sex was no more than Shayne had expected. Wayne picked them young, sexy, and willing. Shayne learned that much about him. He said, in answer to her come-on smile, "No, baby, not today."

"Sir?"

"Skip it. I want to see Mr. Wayne."

"Do you have an appointment, sir?"

"Nope, no appointment. Mr. Wayne will see me."

"I think Mr. Wayne is getting ready to leave for the day. It's almost five o'clock. I'm getting ready to leave too."

"I'll keep that in mind for future reference. Today, I won't need you. Only Mr. Wayne. You be a nice girl and press one of those buttons on the intercom and tell Mr. Wayne a Mr. Mike Shayne wishes to see him on the Velisha matter. Velisha. Got it?"

"Velisha?"



"Yes, baby. Velisha." He spelled it out.

She pushed a button on the intercom. "Mr. Wayne, there's a Mr. Mike Shayne to see you. Yes, sir, I told him that. He said it was about the Velisha matter? Yes, sir. Right away. Mr. Wayne, may I leave now? It's five o'clock. Yes, sir. Thank you."

Shayne smiled at her, spread his hands. "See? I told you so. The Velisha matter is top secret."

"Yeah? I never heard of it. Gee, the things that go on around here." She began to gather her things together.

"Yeah, I'll bet. Well, have a nice evening." He gave her a broad smile.

"I'm going home," she retorted. "That's a nice evening? You going home from here too?"

"No, baby. I'm going to police headquarters. See you tomorrow."

"Huh?" she said, and opened her red mouth wide.

X

MIKE SHAYNE had already turned his back and strode into Wayne's office. It was furnished luxuriously, in the top executive motif. Bruce Wayne rose from behind his desk and regarded Shayne curiously. He was about to extend his hand, seemed to think better of it, and said, "You mentioned Velisha, Mr. Shayne. What about her?"

"At the moment, nothing. I used that as a ruse to get in to see you, not that I couldn't have done so any other way. However, I like to do things the easy way. Sit down, Wayne. This may hurt you a little."

"You're being presumptuous, aren't you, Mr. Shayne. I call waiters by their last name."

Shayne gave him a wry grin, and then the grin faded from his face. "Frankly, Wayne, the way I see you, you're nothing

but a bum, and not a high class bum at that. You can forget that top-drawer crap and come down to earth, to reality, for the first time in your life. Understand?"

"Look, I don't know who you are and what you want but I don't have to listen to that kind of talk, not from you or anyone else. You can get the hell out of here right now!"

Shayne made a derogatory noise with his tongue and lips. "Wayne, I look at you and my stomach turns. I talked to your wife. I also talked to Velisha Gillette. I'll say one thing, your trading instincts in the women's market are about as bad as your general character. Maybe not. You couldn't understand a decent woman. Or love her."

"Mr. Shayne, I've heard all I want to hear from you. Get the hell out of here or I'm going to call the police."

"Yeah, you just do that little thing. It will save me the trouble about ten minutes from now. Wayne, I see you as a thief and a murderer, and a few other nasty things thrown in for good measure, but those two will do."

Wayne's face turned pale. He began to stammer.

"What do you mean by that?" he retorted, but there was no strength in his tone.

"I mean, *you* staged the

robbery of the two million dollars in bearer bonds. You were way over your head in debt. Gambling, high living, keeping women like Velisha Gillette, so, in order to meet your debts and continue your way of life, though it stunk to high heaven, you set up the fake robbery."

"That's a lie! The safe was drilled. The office was broken into, the door jimmied. The police know all that."

"Sure, from their initial investigation. Like me, however, they were skeptical. Let me tell you this first. I represent Oliver Reed of Investors Guild. I'm a private investigator. Okay? Now, I'm interested primarily in recovering those bonds. Where are they?"

"I don't know what you're talking about. I don't have the bonds. How could I? They were stolen."

"Wayne, stop playing games with me. You're out of your league. I'll give you some information. The police are holding a man named Robert Summers, who has a long record of safe burglary. His partner was a burglar with a long record also named Joe Ross. Ross was killed. I'll get around to that in a minute. Summers has signed a confession admitting that he and

Ross were propositioned by Velisha Gillette to rob your safe. All they got was twenty thousand dollars in bonds. The rest you got. You removed those bonds prior to the robbery and hid them. How's that?"

"I don't know what you're talking about. You can't prove a thing. That's all conjecture. Who the hell is going to believe that? Your assumption or this—this man Summers?"

"Well, Wayne, first of all, you reported a theft of two million dollars in bonds. That was your first mistake. I have in my pocket photostatic copies of checks you endorsed and cashed under the name of Benjamin Woods. That was your second mistake. Handwriting experts will positively identify the endorser of those checks as you. You don't know enough, or were too damn sure of yourself, to try to disguise your handwriting, not that it would have done any good. Your thefts go back two years.

"Well, that's as far as I got today. What will happen is that every bank in Florida will be circularized and asked to report the cashing of bearer bonds by any person in the last three or four years. How's that for a starter?"

Wayne's eyes rolled into his head then back again. "You're

lying. You don't have any photostats of any kind."

"No?" Shayne reached into his inside jacket pocket and took out an envelope, spread out the ten copies of the checks he had received from the banks. "Look familiar to you, Wayne?"

Wayne's face went a deadly shade of white. He pushed himself up from his chair, reeled a little and placed both hands on the desk to steady himself. "Shayne, look, we can settle this matter between ourselves. No one need know. I'll make you a rich man."

"Yeah? How?"

"A hundred thousand dollars."

"You're in the bargain basement, Wayne. My principles are in the higher priced sections."

"Two hundred thousand dollars then."

"How? In bearer bonds?"

"No. In cash. I'll convert—I'll get the cash."

"You've said enough, Wayne. You'll convert some of the bonds into cash. You're really something, Wayne. You steal two million dollars, pay off two stupid thieves with a measely twenty thousand, and now you want to buy me for ten per cent of what you stole. You value your life cheaply, Wayne. You see, there's a murder rap waiting for you too.

You killed Joe Ross. That was mistake number three. You're a rank amateur in theft, Wayne. You couldn't plan the theft of a roll of toilet tissue from your own bathroom."

"I didn't kill Ross!" Wayne yelled. "I didn't do it. I didn't!"

"The hell you didn't. I've got the gun you used in the killing. Took it from under the front seat of your car. It's registered in your name. That's pretty airtight. The district attorney will spell it all out to the jury. You hired Ross to rob your safe. He got only ten grand. When he read in the papers that the amount was two million he came back to you and tried to blackmail you for more money. That's when you decided to kill him. Motive and opportunity. Good enough?"

"I didn't do it, I tell you!" He pounded the desk. "I told her not to do it. She insisted!"

"She?"

"Yes. She. Velisha!"

"But you were with her, weren't you?"

"I drove the car. Ross sat in the front seat and Velisha was in the back seat. I swear it. That's the way it happened!"

"Wayne, no jury is going to believe that story, especially if there are men on the jury, and you can bet your last dime the jury will be stacked with the

right kind of men. Her lawyer will see to that."

Shayne knew at the moment that so far there wasn't a thing against Velisha Gillette that a clever trial lawyer couldn't beat. He was fairly certain, too, that Bruce Wayne wasn't the kind who would take the rap alone. He would try to take everyone with him. The thing now was to get him to give up as much information against Velisha as possible that would involve her in both the robbery and the murder.

"Velisha insisted that if we didn't kill Ross that he would bleed us dry. I told her it would be better to pay him off."

"How much did he want?"

"A hundred thousand dollars."

"How did she get her hands on the gun?"

"I kept it in the glove compartment of the car. She knew it was there. I lent her the car on many occasions during the day."

"You knew she wasn't playing around with you alone, didn't you?" Shayne said, and watched Wayne's eyes for his reaction.

"You're wrong!" Wayne shot back. "She loved me. I loved her."

"Some love!" Shayne let out a hollow laugh. "Get wise, Wayne. She even tried to put

the make on me. She wanted to trade her sex for immunity. You sure picked a prize package this time."

The jab struck home. Wayne's face burned with jealousy and rage. He shouted, "After she shot Ross and we pushed him out of the car she went through his pockets and took nine thousand dollars worth of the bonds he had on him. She put five of the bonds back."

"No one's going to believe that either, making her out a ghoul."

"The hell they won't! She cashed the bonds in the casino at Paradise Island. You can check that out. The manager will confirm it. I didn't kill Ross, I tell you. I won't go to prison for life for something I didn't do. She did it!"

"Okay, Wayne. Let's get to the bonds. Where are the rest of the bonds?"

"Velisha mailed them!"

"To Scranton?"

"Yes. General Delivery. She marked them 'Hold for pickup.' The package is a square carton, addressed to herself."

Shayne swore under his breath. Sure. She was tricky as hell. She sent her parents the gift of silver for their twenty-fifth anniversary. That would be her reason for going to Scranton. While there, she

would pick up the bonds. And then?

"Wayne, you're a bigger fool than I thought. You didn't think that Velisha would come back to Miami after she picked up the bonds, did you?"

"Yes, I did. We had it all arranged. After the insurance company paid off we would wait a reasonable time and then leave the country. We had planned to go to South America."

Shayne shook his head. It was inconceivable a guy like this could be such an utter fool. "Wayne, let me tell you something. Velisha would have picked up those bonds and taken a plane to Europe, to the French or Italian Riviera and left you holding the bag. She played you right, hooked you but good. She was ready to stuff you and put you on a wall alongside the other fish."

"You're going to help me, aren't you? You won't let them put me away on that murder charge! I couldn't live in a prison cell for the rest of my life."

"You asked for it, Wayne. You built every dirty brick in your miserable house."

Wayne's voice was a hoarse croak. He buried his face in his hands and whimpered, "Don't let them do it to me. Please!" He took his hands from his

face. His skin was dead white. He cried, "I've got more evidence. Here!" He opened the middle drawer of his desk. A gun flashed in his hand. He pointed the gun at Shayne. "You won't take me. Never!"

A shot exploded. The slug whizzed by Shayne's ear. He dropped to the floor as another shot passed over his head. He rolled toward the desk, rose up and slugged Wayne in the belly. Wayne doubled over.

Shayne grabbed the hand that held the gun and brought it down on a corner of the desk. There was the sound of bone splintering. Wayne screamed in pain. The gun fell to the floor. Shayne hit Wayne again, two solid punches to the face, and Wayne fell across the chair and onto the floor.

Shayne picked up the gun and pocketed it. He then reached down and yanked Wayne to his feet, slammed him into the chair. "You never know when to quit, do you, Wayne? You dumb bastard! I'm going to add attempted murder to the rest of the charges the fuzz will file against you. If you're lucky enough to beat the Ross killing, this and the robbery will keep you on ice until you're a very old man."

"I'll kill myself first!" Wayne cried.

"You already have. Maybe a

lot of other people too. Your wife. Your family. You were going to leave everything and everybody and run away to South America. The insurance company would have paid only half the loss and all the investors who trusted you would have lost half their investment. You never thought of that, did you? No. Just yourself."

Something that may have been regret for the things he had done, and perhaps remorse, too, came in Wayne's words. "I was a fool, an awful fool. I see that now." His tone was weary and there was a note of resignation in it, something akin to the posture of a man who is walking the last steps to the gallows.

Shayne shook his head. He said, "If you'll cooperate with the police you may get a break after all. Stranger things have happened."

Wayne looked up. His eyes were dull and wet. "I'll cooperate. I'll tell the truth about everything."

"That's fine. I'll do what I can in that case."

He picked up the phone, dialed police headquarters and asked for Chief Gentry. The Chief answered almost immediately.

"Shayne, Will. It's all over. Send over a couple of men to

the South Poiciana Apartments in Hollywood and pick up Velisha Gillette. Apartment 7-D. Book her for robbery and murder."

"I'll send Dave Penner and Arnold Leib. They're a good team."

"Next, get in touch with the postal department and inform them the stolen bonds are in a carton addressed to Velisha Gillette. The bonds are being held in General Delivery, Scranton, marked 'Hold until called for.' That's your evidence against Gillette."

"Got it. What else?"

"I'm in Bruce Wayne's office. He'll cooperate, all the way. Send a couple of men to take him in."

"That will be Len Sturgis. He'll take one of the men on his team. You've certainly been busy, Mike." He gave a short laugh. "Sturgis will hate your guts for breaking the case but he'll also give you credit for it. He's a good cop."

"I know. Will, I'm calling Tim Rourke. He helped. The story belongs to him. You'll allow him interviews and photos?"

"Yeah, sure," Gentry said a little harshly. "The skinny bum gets in my hair but I guess he's got a job to do like everybody else. Okay, Mike. The D.A. will want to talk to you. Are

you coming down with Len Sturgis?"

"Yeah. In my own car this time. I'll see you." He hung up and turned to Wayne.

"Will you do me a favor, Mr. Shayne?" Bruce Wayne asked. "Please."

"What is it?"

"Will you get in touch with my wife? Explain things to her?"

"I'll do better than that. I'll pick her up and bring her to headquarters. You can explain things to her yourself, I think that would be better."

"Yes," he agreed solemnly, "yes, I think it would. I don't know how I'll do it but I'll try."

"It shouldn't be too hard, Wayne. Just tell her the truth. I think she would appreciate hearing that from you. There's

a lot of the thing called nobility in her. She may even forgive you."

"I don't deserve it," he replied sadly.

"You've just made a good start toward it. Being honest with yourself. You keep digging inside yourself. There may be a lot of good things left there you haven't used. You feel a little better now?"

Wayne looked up. Some of the color returned to his face. "Frankly, yes. I'm glad it ended like this. Like you said, I was being hooked, ready to be stuffed, and hung on a wall with the rest of the fish Velisha caught. I wouldn't have liked that at all. Am I improving?"

"A whole lot. I'll explain some of this to your wife."

"Thanks, Mr. Shayne. Thanks for everything."

Complete in the Next Issue—

SNATCH A DEAD MAN...

The New MIKE SHAYNE Short Novel

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Somewhere in the Miami night a dead man waited, waited for his onetime friends to give him a decent farewell—or his foes to commit the final desecration of his flesh. Here is Mike Shayne at his finest, bullet-studded hour. Don't fail to read this engrossing tale of a man who lived—and died—twice in the same day!

HOME MOVIES

by

EDWARD D. HOCH

No one knew what happened that day. No one but a blackened body—and a movie...

COME ON, now, everybody get a seat.

You got enough beer there, Harry? Plenty more in the fridge. Jean, get Harry another beer, and Mike too. Can't have people thirsty during the movies.

Well, this reel is the one I shot last year on the camping trip with Margo. Yeah, just before the accident.

Hell, I haven't been able to look at it myself till now! But I don't think it's being morbid showing it like this. You all knew Margo, and she's been dead a year now. I think she'd



want us to look at it and remember some of the good times.

Do you want to get the lights, Jean?

Fine. Now this first scene shows us arriving up at Grand Squaw Lake. Margo's wearing my sheepskin jacket, the one I wore last weekend. She had it on all the time, because she forgot her sweater. Jean's the

same way. Someday I'll get a wife with a good memory. Maybe on the third try, huh?

Anyway, there I am, getting the canoe off the roof of the trailer. Margo took these pictures.

Look at the belly on me, huh? That's when I was drinking a case of beer a week! One thing about Jean, she's slimmed me down.

This is a funny part here. Look, there's Margo in the water, still wearing my damned jacket. She's trying to pull the canoe over to this little dock. God, that was a great weekend.

Until the accident.

This part is just scenery. Look at those trees! And the mountains in the background—see the snow! And in October! There's snow on top of those all year around.

Jean, Mildred's got an empty glass. Get her another beer, huh?"

Oh, yeah. Here's a good part coming up. I shot this from the canoe, while Margo was paddling. Look, look at that! The water's so clear you can see the fish swimming around! Man, if only our lakes back here were half as clear as that!

There's a good shot of Margo. A really handsome woman. I like to remember her the way she was then, that day.

Well, we're back at camp

now. You can see it's getting dark. That's all the film I shot the first day.

Man, this is thirsty work!

Here's the next morning. Margo is frying bacon for breakfast. One thing I've got to say for her, she was a hard worker. Maybe sometimes we had our spats, but she was a hard worker.

Well...

This is just more of the lake, and the mountains.

Yeah, that's right, Sid. Sure, it was cold the whole weekend. See, here's Margo still bundled up, waving good-by to me. I'm off for some fishing.

That, right there, is the last time I saw her alive.

This was a little later. I took this shot of the camp when I saw the fire. Of course I didn't know what had happened yet then.

That's the end of it.

Want to turn the lights on, Jean? Fine.

Well, maybe it was a bid morbid, seeing it like that.

Sure, but it was a year ago, Harry. She's been dead a whole year.

What happened? Well, they never really found out. I guess the damn camp stove exploded. Anyway, she was pretty badly burned. I did what I could, but I guess she was already dead by the time I made it back to

shore. A terrible thing, terrible. Did it upset you, seeing them, Jean? Hell, maybe I shouldn't have shown them after all. Let's see, what else have we got here?

This is one of Jean and me on our honeymoon last winter. We went to Bermuda in January. Some people said we didn't wait long enough after Margo's death, but hell, none of us are getting any younger! Beautiful place, Bermuda.

Let's have another beer, huh? Sid, you ready? Gert? Mildred?

Jean, these people all got empty glasses!

What was that, Sid? The jacket?

Yeah, I still got it. I told you, I just wore it last weekend.

In the movie? If she was wearing it when the camping stove exploded, and caught fire, it would have been burned

along with her? Is that what you're asking?

Hell, she probably got warm and took it off!

Oh, sure, I know she was bundled up when I left, but—

Damn it, what are you trying to say?

If it happened when I said, right after I left her, she'd have been wearing the jacket, and if it happened much later, after the day warmed up, then I lied about the time? Is that what you think?

Is it?

You think I hit her on the head, and left her by the stove, and fixed it to explode? And first I removed my sheepskin jacket from the body?

You're saying I killed her! Jean—Jean, listen to these people! They're saying I killed Margo!

Jean?

Jean?



FOR FASTER SERVICE—USE ZIP CODE NUMBERS!
 REMEMBER, ZIP NUMBERS ARE PART OF YOUR
 ADDRESS! AVOID LAST MINUTE RUSH! MAIL EARLY
 IN THE DAY! IT'S FASTER THAT WAY!

MAX KAGAN said, "I tell you, Johnny, there's going to be blood on the rugs. Somebody's got to get killed. I mean it."

"Everytime you breathe, Max," I said, "a Chinaman dies."

"I don't like jokes, Johnny. I don't joke, and you know it.

plenty of times, on his way to the top.

Right now he was mad enough to kill, and whether he pulled the trigger himself or had it done for him was only a matter of splitting hairs.

I sat in a hotel room that was costing Hagan one hundred and fifty dollars a day. Outside

Escape Me Never

Alive, she must have been a real dish. Dead, strangled, she was ugly. Could I find her killer before a bullet found me first?

by EDWARD Y. BREESE

Somebody has to be killed for this. I will do it, and you know I will. This is no time for joking."

"Yes," I said. "I know that, Max."

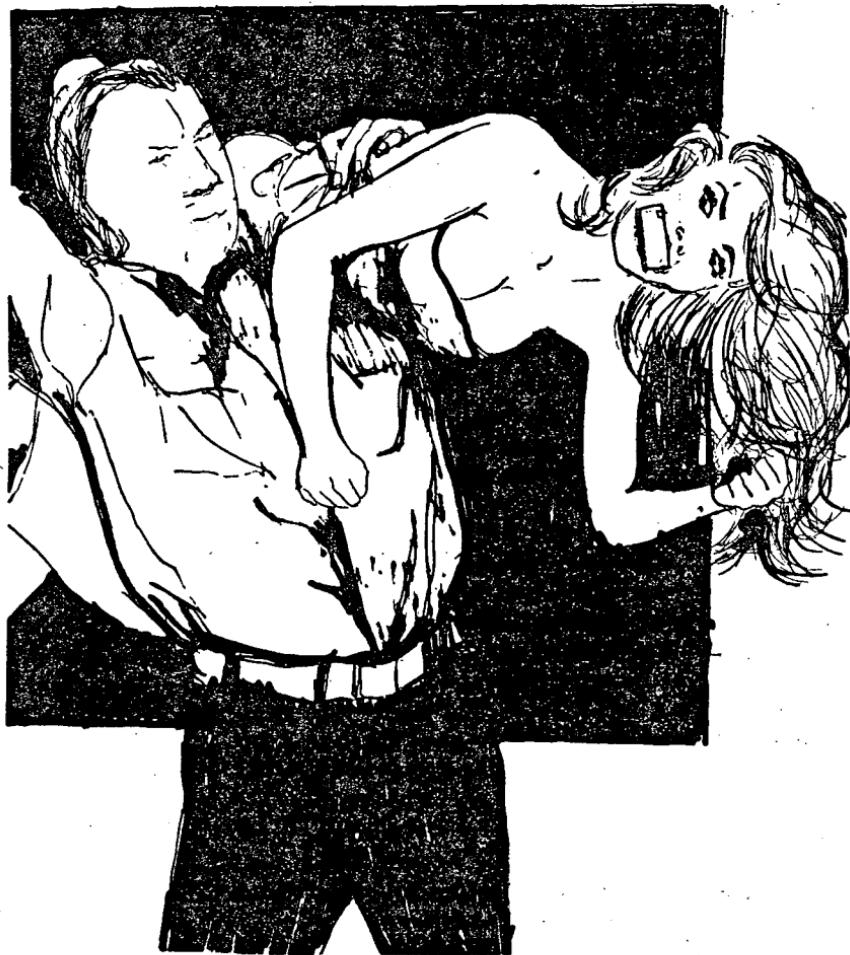
I knew it all right. Max Kagan usually ordered his killings done the way he ordered a sandwich from room service, but he was perfectly capable of doing the job himself. It was said that he had,

the windows the blue Atlantic foamed against Miami Beach. A little way back from the beach the Olympic-size swimming pool was fringed by twenty tons of crisping human meat.

Between them the sun bathers probably controlled five billion dollars in capital assets. It was that kind of hotel. From the twelfth floor where I sat they were only so many pinkish smears against the gleaming tile.

Featuring

JOHNNY HAWK



I'm Johnny Hawk, and I control an inquiring mind, a fast set of muscular reactions, and a Colt's New Service .45. The fact I'm willing to use all three lets me do for other people the things they can't or won't do themselves.

I was there because the Hotel Grande Splendide is part of old Vince Cobarelli's estate. His widow and executrix is a good friend of mine. When Kagan called her, she called me. Just that simple.

"They shouldn't have done it," Max Kagan said bitterly. "My own sister and brother-in-law! Sweetest people you ever saw. Strictly nice people. And some bum clips them for two hundred gees in cash and rocks right here in this place."

"I'm sure," I said sincerely, "the bum didn't know she was your sister."

"Of course he didn't." Kagan was shocked. "He should've shot himself first. That's got nothing to do with it. He oughta have known. I'm gonna teach him—teach him real good."

He was just the man to do it too. Max Kagan was five-foot-three and four feet across the shoulders; with hands that could tear telephone books or twist throats with equal ease. In case he was too tired to exert himself, his boys would torture

their own mothers to death with no compunction at all.

"Let me handle it, Max," I said, without much hope that he'd go along. "You know I get results. Whoever did it—I'll find out. Then I'll even gift-wrap him and turn him over to the law. You've got my word on it."

"I know, Johnny. I know. But I can't do it that way. This is personal, my own blood. I got to handle this myself. Don't you see?"

"It's natural you feel that way, Max," I said. "I got to think about the hotel first, though. A big scandal here won't help any with the season just starting. It could hurt plenty, scare the big spenders away. It could cost a lot of money. You let me handle things. I can keep it all nice and quiet."

"Forget it, Johnny," Kagan said. "I don't want to hurt the hotel. That's how come I called Terry Cobarelli and told her I was here. But this I have to do myself. Not that it won't be a pleasure."

"How do you plan to do it?" I asked.

"Just about the way you would, Johnny. First I bait the trap. Then when the bum shows up I slice him up in little pieces."

The plan he outlined was

logical enough as far as it went. He knew no cat-burglar or hood would touch Max Kagan with a ten foot pole, so he was setting up a dummy as bait. The president of one of the legitimate manufacturing companies he controlled had been checked in with his wife in the suite right across the hall.

He had orders to spend and bet lavishly and to let his wife flash her jewels all over town. He was the bait, and Max and his boys were watching the trap night and day from across the hall. The first rat nose to come sniffing was due to be mashed out of all recognition.

"Suppose it isn't the same one who hit your sister?" I asked.

"No matter," Kagan said. "Them bums are all alike, as far as I'm concerned."

"How will you know if you get the right one?"

"Easy, Johnny, easy. We leave him enough face to take a picture of. Remember, Molly saw the bum. If it ain't the right one, we try some more." Max Kagan was sure of himself—too sure I thought.

I knew the story from the local police and the hotel people. Kagan's brother-in-law, Sam Bitzen, had spent three weeks with his wife at the Grande Splendide. He was a big spender, but most of the time

he kept his money and her jewels in the hotel safe and just drew out what they wanted when they needed it. They even checked in her jewels before retiring after a night on the town. The only time they were really vulnerable was exactly the time the hit was made.

That was about thirty minutes before they were due to check out. Bitzen had collected all their valuables from the desk clerk for his wife to pack. He stopped in the hotel bar for one drink, and then carried the bundle up to their suite.

The lights went out for Sam Bitzen as he stepped through the door. He never saw the man who laid a sap back of his ear. Molly was already laid out on the bed with adhesive tape around her wrists and ankles and over her mouth.

When Bitzen came to, everything of value was gone, including the emerald and diamond cuff-links he'd been wearing. His own wrists and ankles were taped up, but his mouth wasn't. He was able to knock the room phone out of its cradle and yell for help. He and Molly had apparently been yelling ever since. Brother Max had been a good listener.

As he said, his sister had seen the man. She'd been at the pool with a woman friend, but a

headache had sent her back to the room for aspirin. When she walked in, the thief was already there. He waved a gun at her till she lay down to be tied up. She got a good look at him while they waited for Sam Bitzen to show. He didn't try to search the room or anything, except to lift the couple of hundred bucks she had in her bag. He just waited.

The man wasn't even masked when she came in. Later he pulled one of her best nylons over his head, but she'd gotten a good look at his face. Although it was just an ordinary, middle aged face, and apparently not in the Beach police mug books, she swore she'd know it again. His clothes were hidden by a long white smock-type garment. "Like a scientist," she had said.

I gathered from all this that the heist man had known Sam was due up any moment with the sparklers and government lettuce. He hadn't expected Molly back from the pool or wherever. If he had, he'd have been masked. When he left, he probably put the white coat in a bag and took the elevator down to the lobby.

As far as I was concerned this bore every mark of a highly professional job. I was ready to bet this one wouldn't come close to falling for Kagan's

"trap". I didn't say so, though. At least watching his stooge would keep Kagan out of trouble. A killing or the like would mean rough publicity for the hotel to live down.

"Like they say, Max," I told him, "you're sharp as a razor."

"Don't you ever forget it, Johnny," he said. "Nobody never hits my family and walks away clean. Not never."

"Good luck," I said with crossed fingers, and got out of the hundred and fifty dollars a day suite.

FIRST I took the elevator down to the big office complex off the ground floor lobby. I was looking for "Smooth" Rafferty, the Grande Splendide security head. He was in his office.

Rafferty was an over-sized black Irishman with a face and manner to match his name. He wore Italian silk suits that fit him far too well and alligator shoes. He wore a two carat diamond on a manicured longshoreman's hand, where it was out of place.

"We're not buying today, Johnny," he said when I came in. He made it sound like, "Go to hell!"

"That's right, Rafferty," I said. "You're not buying. Today you're cooperating for a

change. I'm not selling. I'm telling."

"Says who?"

"Says the owner, private eye. You want to make something of it?"

He did, but he knew I was close to Terry Cobarelli. He thought what he'd do in my place, and decided to go along. The nickname came from more than his looks.

Rafferty was a holdover from the days when Vince Cobarelli had still run his own affairs. He'd been security chief in his present spot for a good ten years, and had apparently done a good job of it. The word around town was that he ran a taut ship. The G-S had never been raided. When a floating game moved in it operated quietly. The girls were clean and discouraged from trying any real shake-downs on the Happy Charlies. Pickpockets and the better known short-con artists stayed out of the lobby. All in all it was a "smooth" operation.

I still didn't like Rafferty. Too smooth maybe. He had no record of association with the Syndicate. Way back he'd been a cop, then a shamus, then security head at one of the tracks, then the Grande Splendide.

Maybe it was the shamus part that got my hackles up.



Stealing business secrets and planting microphones in the beds of bored wives wasn't my idea of the way a man should live. I'm too strong for privacy to like a private eye. Anyway I didn't like Rafferty.

I still had to do business with him, whether I liked him or not.

"You've got some rough guests today," I said.

Rafferty only looked bored. "If you mean Max Kagan's playing detective upstairs," he said, "that's no news to me. He's put out bait and he's waiting to strong-arm a sucker. What else's new?"

"I am," I said. His manner annoyed me.

He stopped picking his nose with a manicured finger. "What's that mean, Hawk?"

"Mr. Hawk to you," I said. "It means I want the goon who heisted Max's kinfolk. He's bad for the hotel. Max would just get blood all over the oriental rugs. I want the man first."

"Your neck's out, Hawk," he said. "Internal security is my job."

"Mr. Hawk," I reminded him. "And security's your job unless somebody decides you'd do better parking cars." I let him think that over. Humility is good for the soul.

"Okay, Mister Hawk. What do you need to know?"

I fired off some questions and got some answers. On the whole they didn't surprise me.

There'd been other heists. At least there had been five formal complaints about them in the past year, maybe a few more where the victims couldn't or wouldn't squawk. When I got the details from Rafferty and the files all of the five ran to a pattern.

They were all big heists with large sums of money and jewelry taken. The smallest of the lot involved a claimed loss of fifteen thousand in cash and eighty-five thousand in assorted furs and stones. Even discounting for brag, and hope of a big insurance payoff, that meant twenty thousand dollars or so besides the cash. The largest claimed strike was for a quarter

of a million dollars, mostly in diamonds.

All the hits were made at the same time, after the victim had taken his property out of the safe. Invariably this was shortly before a scheduled check-out of the guests.

I looked up from the last file. "It's plain as the nose on—"

"My face," Smooth Rafferty finished for me. "I'm no amateur, Hawk. This has to be somebody with an inside connection. Otherwise he wouldn't know when the tree was ripe for shaking. I can see that as well as you can."

"Get me a schedule," I said, "of everybody working the front at the time the safe was opened for each of the mooches."

"I've already checked," he said.

"I'm unreasonable," I told him. "I want to check too. It might be I can spot something you missed. I want personnel files on the desk man on duty, the manager on the floor, the cashiers who did the disbursing, the bell captains on duty, and any office people who could possibly know the safe was being opened. If you've got it, I also want a list of any guests the victims were pally with. Someplace there's got to be a pattern."

"Yeah," he said. "All we've got to do is find it."

"Find it," I corrected him, "before Murderous Maxie spills blood and guts all over the floor. He's loaded right now. Lord help any innocent drunk who blunders into his 'trap' room. Get all you have together and send it up to my room."

"What room you got?"

"I don't have it yet. I'm going by the desk now."

"We're full up."

"You find me something," I said. "Cancel somebody's reservation, if you have to. I want to be right on hand till this is over."

He laughed. "Sometimes it's not that easy."

It wasn't. Finally I got into a cubbyhole in the rear of the North Annex, back where some of the staff were quartered. It was ten feet square with a hard bed and a view of the delivery entrance to the basement kitchens. Odors of garbage and soapsuds where the cement had been washed substituted for ocean breezes. Moving me in seemed to give Rafferty real satisfaction.

When one of the clerks brought up an armful of folders from personnel records, I sent him right back for more. I wanted the file on all the maids who'd been on duty when and where the hits were made and

the elevator girls serving those floors.

At the beginning a case of the sort I was working on calls for painstaking, and apparently endless, research. It's hard work, but it has to be done.

Unlike a murder I couldn't isolate a small group of suspects to start with. At any given moment the Splendide's thousand rooms house from one to three thousand guests and from nine to twelve hundred employees; depending on the season. Any one of both lots could be a suspect. So could any one of the hundreds of people who come in and out every day on more or less legitimate business of their own. Nobody can watch that many people.

The field has to be narrowed down. Brains, you say? Sure, but a terrific lot of leg work and just plain detail comes first. The double armful of personnel files were in that category.

When I looked at the pile I got a headache. Johnny Hawk's lazy. Born lazy and cultivated the talent ever since. Besides I wanted to talk some ideas out; so I phoned Teresa Cobarelli and invited myself to dinner in the Florentine Palace on the banks of Indian Creek.

LATE AFTERNOON sun dazzled off the water and made

diamond facets of the windowed mountain peaks of hotels to the East. Inside the patio there was cool shade of mahogany and avocado and the egg-fruit tree. Scarlet and purple bougainvillia flamed against the wall. My drink was a symphony of ice and smooth, aged bourbon and mint. Terry was Terry in pastel linen and a single strand of matched pearls from the hot soup of the Persian Gulf.

"You're sure it's an inside job, Johnny?" she asked.

"I'm not really sure of anything," I said. "It could be anybody, anybody at all. I think there has to be an inside connection because of the timing. In every case the victim was hit as soon as he brought his loot out in the open. Somebody knew he had it on him, knew right down to the minute. That means he didn't only know what day the guest was checking out; he knew down to the minute when he had the stuff on him. That's where we start."

"He could sit in the lobby and watch a guest make a pick-up of valuables at the desk." Terry sweetened her drink.

"Possible. Anything's possible. But not probable. Remember, in every one of these heists the stick man was waiting in the

room when the guest got back from the desk. That's close timing. He couldn't always count on beating him up the elevators. He had to know the room was open, the wife or girl friend out, and the pickup being made at an exact time. I think the room was watched by somebody close by and a phone call made from the desk or lobby when the guest started upstairs."

"All that means," she said, "is that there'd have to be two outsiders."

"Or two insiders. That's what I really think. Remember somebody had to nominate one particular guest for the hit each time. He had to know who had real stones in the safe and who had paste; which paper-wrapped package held cash in small bills or large, and which held traveler's checks. These aren't casual heists. I think every one was set up in advance. An inside contact is needed for that sort of thing."

"Well suppose you're right?"

"I've got to be sure. There are probably thirty people who might be in on this—more if maids and stuff are concerned. I have to find the inside contact and the actual heist man. It'll be hard. Anybody in the front office has a right to use the phone. Any of them can know what's in the safe; and who's

going to check out when. Anybody could get into the room. You can buy a set of pass keys to all the Beach hotels in New York or Chi for fifty bucks. I've got to get proof that will stand up in court."

"Max Kagan," she said, "won't need that sort of proof."

"I know," I said. "All Max needs is a hunch to start him killing. That's what he means to do too—kill. Somebody touched his own family. That makes Max see red. To him it's sacrilege. I don't want killing. To stop it I've got to get proof before Max even gets a lead."

We watched a big white yacht go slowly up against the tide in midstream.

"Suppose Rafferty is in on it," I suggested.

"I don't think so, Johnny. He's been with the hotel for years. He makes plenty as it is. Why should he be in on this sort of thing all of a sudden?"

"If I could tell you why, I could also tell you if," I said. "Call it a hunch. Maybe I just don't like the guy. No, not that; though I really don't like him. There's something about his place in this that isn't right. Now I can't put my finger on it, but I will. If it's Rafferty, he'll make a mistake. Whoever it is will make a mistake. They always do."

"I suppose they do. But why, Johnny?"

"They suffer from hubris," I said. "The sin of the Greek. The pride of intellect that leads to scorn of the barbarians. The Harpies home in on hubris like vultures on a dying man."

Terry Cobarelli laughed at me. "You mean they think they're smarter than they are and get careless."

I laughed too. "Something like that."

It was getting dark, and servants brought dinner to us on the patio. The chef was an old man who'd cooked for one of the most famous New York speakeasys in the old days. Across the moving water lights bloomed brightly in the hotel windows.

The pile of personnel folders was still there when I got back to the Grande Splendide. It hadn't shrunk any either. I got the windows open in spite of the heat and the clatter of kitchen noises from below. I don't like air-conditioning. Everybody knows that about me.

Below me a gang of swampers were mopping up the concrete around the trash and garbage cans by the light of an unshaded electric bulb. The mops swung in rhythm. The leader was a big, black man, naked to the waist. He sang as

he worked, and his voice was deep-toned and true.

*"Got the fever for a woman
But she got to be new. . . .*

*And when I finish with her
Then I give her back to you."*

The mops went swish, and swiped again at the wet cement. I leaned my brow against the copper screening to hear and see better. Everyone else had the windows closed and the air conditioners whining in the night. The black man was still singing:

*"I got a feever for movin'"
"Fee-vuh for another town,
An' if she try and stop me,
Then I belt that woman down."*

The screen twanged and jumped, an inch from my left temple. All at once there was a round hole there. There was a thud from the wall behind me and a drift of plaster from where the bullet bedded itself. I hit the floor and scrambled to pull the lamp plug out of its socket.

There was no use in trying to spot where the shot had come from. It could have been any one of five hundred windows in the adjoining hotels. It could have been from a car or just from the beach. Not having seen the flash of the gun, I'd never know.

It wasn't really important

anyway. What was important was that somebody wanted me dead. Somebody knew I had the folders and wanted me dead before I read them all. That meant I was closer than I'd thought to an answer. At least my friend the sniper must think so, or he'd never have tried to get me out of the way. I decided to get to work.

With the windows closed and the heavy drapes pulled I wasn't afraid of any more sniping. However I took the precaution of sitting clear of the line of fire as I went through the folders. I had six cases to check, including the Bitzen hit. What I was looking for, of course, was someone on the hotel payroll who was, or could have been, in a position to finger all six.

By four o'clock in the morning I knew I hadn't a clue. The desk and office personnel were on rotating shifts. Not one of them had been on duty at the times when all six guests had picked up their goodies from the safe. A couple had been on duty on three occasions, and one woman assistant cashier four times. That was the closest it came.

The same thing applied to other house personnel. The rooms robbed were on different floors and in three separate wings. Six different floor maids had been on duty. There was no

suspicious correlation of elevator people or bell-hops.

Maybe three or four finger men were involved. I didn't think so. A gang of this sort is usually small. It's safer that way. At four-fifteen I gave up for the night and tried to get some sleep.

It wasn't much of a try. I rolled and tossed. By eight o'clock I was up and shaving. When I dressed I put one of the old hammerless .38 S & W's in a belt holster back of my right hip, just in case the sniper came in close.

I GOT on the house phone and called Rafferty. I wanted all the folk whose records I'd read to be in his office for a personal interview starting at ten o'clock.

"Any of them not on duty," I said, "call them in anyhow. You think of a reason."

"Can do," Rafferty said. "Did you have a good night, Johnny?"

I hadn't mentioned the hole in my screen. I didn't now. "Busy," I said. "Busy as a sore-toothed beaver. I think I'm getting results though."

I just wanted to see how he'd react to that. He didn't. It might mean anything or nothing. I couldn't tell. I felt a little like a kid groping for feathers after a pillow fight in

the dark. I put a cashmere sports coat to cover the gun on my belt and went down to one of the hotel restaurants for breakfast.

I was still hacking at a grapefruit when Max Kagan came up and sat down with me. Three of his boys took the next table. They were hung with as many guns as a squad of commandoes. Kagan matched my order for steak and eggs before getting to the point.

"Johnny," he said, "you catch this heist guy, what you gonna do with him?"

"If I catch him, Max, I'm going to hand him to John Law. I'm going to give him to The Man all gift-wrapped and ready to do thirty years."

"That ain't like you, Johnny."

"Sure it is, Max. I do a job, but I'm not bloodthirsty. You never knew me to kill a man who didn't insist on it. How come you ask me?" I attacked my steak.

"It's that I'm a careful guy, Johnny. I like to know right where everybody stands all the time. You know how it is."

I said, "I know you're a fox, Max. Smart like a fox. How I stand isn't important till you're close to hitting pay-dirt. So I think you got a hot lead on something."

I went on eating while Max

Kagan thought it over. He put big chunks of steak in his mouth and chewed noisily while he made up his mind. He had the linen napkin tucked into his collar to protect a fifty-dollar, hand-painted French cravat.

"Okay, Johnny," he said finally. "I'll level with you because maybe you can help me anyhow. Last night I seen some friends over in Miami. When they hear me out, they got interesting news. It seems this here Mr. Big of this flea-trap inn, he's been busy with the ponies and the dice for a couple years now."

"Rafferty," I said. It was a shot in the dark. The way his eyes hooded, I knew it was a hit.

"You shoulda told me you knew."

"I only guessed, Max. How deep is he in?"

"I'd hate to think you'd held out on me," Kagan said. Then; "I guess you didn't know at that. He wins and he loses, big every time. Mostly he loses. A hundred an' fifty grand, give or take ten, in the two years. Vince's widow don't pay him that sort of dough to play house dick. He's gotta have something else going for him."

"No," I said, "she doesn't. So that gives a motive. But a motive by itself isn't proof. A

court won't convict on motive."

"I ain't no court," Max Kagan said.

I took a chance. "You think you are. You're judge and jury, prosecutor and hangman, all in one package in your own mind. Don't do it, Max. Anyway don't hurry. Give me a chance to get some real proof and find out who's in it with him. You want the man who put a gun on your sister, don't you? Well it's sure enough that wasn't Rafferty. Besides he can't run anywhere you can't follow him. You got nothing to lose by waiting."

If there's such a thing as a fat, elderly cotton-mouth moccasin, that's what Max Kagan looked like right then. The grease smears at the corners of his mouth could have been venom. Finally he spoke. "I guess I ain't in no real hurry, Johnny. But I ain't promising a thing, mind. And so long as you want I should play ball with you; you gotta level with me. You tell me anything you find out."

"I'll do that, Max," I said.

I didn't know if I'd convinced him of anything or not. Probably not. Still, it was all I could do at the time.

I was in Rafferty's office before ten. He looked big and tough and smooth as ever. If



anything was worrying him, it didn't show. I wondered if a motive, even a good one, really did prove anything by itself.

The outer office was full of nervous-looking people. They didn't know what they were there for, but whatever it was they weren't going to like it. They had their minds made up to that for sure. I didn't have to be a detective or a mind-reader to spot it.

As usual I didn't try to outsmart the people I was interviewing. I just asked them

to confirm certain facts from their records, including the fact they'd been at work on the days of the robberies. I then asked each one for any theory he might have as to "whodunit" and let him or her talk.

Mostly they didn't talk. I suppose they didn't want to get involved. Either that, or lacked the imagination to have done any real speculating. Those who did have a theory invariably postulated international jewel thieves or some other outside group.

For an hour I got precisely nowhere at all. Then the break came while I was questioning one of the assistant cashiers.

"No," she said, "I wasn't on duty all three of those dates. Only on one of them."

"But," I said, "the payroll record here shows—"

"It's right and not right," she said. "I mean those were my regular shifts. That part's right. I don't deny it. But I didn't work the last two dates you named. I switched shifts with another girl. She worked my time and I worked hers. We all do it sometimes. Usually we don't tell the payroll people. The amount each of us gets is the same anyway, and it makes for trouble changing the records. Unless one of us has overtime or something, we don't do it. You see?"

I saw. "Who did you exchange with on those two days?"

"Both times it was Lynda Schwartz," she said. "She told me her boyfriend was in town and she'd rather work days and get the evening off."

As soon as she left the office I made a quick check. As I'd suspected, Lynda Scheartz was the girl who was already down as working at the time of four robberies. The added two dates made it a grand slam for her.

I called Rafferty's secretary and asked her to send Lynda in right away. A moment later she was back on the phone. "Miss Scheartz isn't in the office, Mr. Hawk. Evidently she didn't answer the call. Nobody out here has seen her today."

"Try her at home."

"I tried to call her, sir. There was no answer at the other end."

I shot out of there, leaving the rest of the people just sitting around, and grabbed a cab in front of the hotel. "Hurry it up," I told the hacker, and showed government green to make it real for him. He burned rubber.

I had the address from the personnel file. It was a near-new apartment in a high-rent district. Lynda had been doing well by herself.

It was no trouble to get in.

You don't have to be a hood to carry a full set of pass-keys. Anybody can buy. The third one I tried did the trick.

As I'd feared, the body was on the oversized, over-ruffled bed. Somebody had closed Lynda's mouth permanently with a length of plastic clothesline around the throat. In life she'd been a real good looking doll.

She wasn't good looking any more. Strangulation pops the eyes and turns the tongue and parts of the face purple-black. Not even a beauty contest figure in a filmy nightgown can counter that.

Whoever did it hadn't left any obvious clues. I was careful not to touch anything that might still carry his prints, and to wipe off the knob and door where I'd touched them myself. Then I went down the back stair, meeting nobody, and walked two blocks to a drug store pay phone. I put in an anonymous call to the Beach police. They could pick up the pieces on this one.

It was clear enough to me why Lynda had been hit. Mr. Big knew I'd spot her sooner or later from the research I was doing as his office contact. He just wanted to be sure she didn't name him when the time came.

To my mind that meant it

had to be Rafferty. The actual heist man was probably some minor hood on the Grande Splendide payroll. He didn't have enough to lose by getting caught to make a killing worth the risk. He'd probably already spent better than half his life in stir. Most of them have. A few more years wouldn't bulk large compared to a chance of the hot seat.

If my man was Rafferty, his position was entirely different. He stood to lose a good job, a fortune, an easy life—and everything that made it worth living for him. Once convicted on a robbery and betrayal-of-trust rap, he'd never in the world get back to where he was today. His imagination would dress up the future even worse than it would actually be. I didn't think a man of his sort, in a spot like that, would hesitate to kill.

Of course knowing who it was was one thing, and proving it was another. Lynda couldn't talk now and I hadn't the vaguest notion who the third man was. Maybe Rafferty had left a clue at Lynda's that would lead the homicide people to him. I couldn't count on that. In fact he probably hadn't.

What I looked for was the mistakes criminal types always made. Rafferty was as vulner-

able as the rest of them. Once he started this game he had to have Lynda and a strong-arm boy. That meant it wasn't a secret any more. So he had to kill Lynda, which was a mistake too. So was not finding out he was hitting Max Kagan's sister. That one had started the whole pot boiling. So far his record at pulling off the perfect crime had been pretty lousy. I had to bank on its not improving as he went along.

WHILE I was thinking things out I took a bus down Collins Avenue to the Splendide. I'd let the cab go when he dropped me at Lynda's building. Eventually the police would find him and try to figure out who I was. By that time I wanted Rafferty nailed to the wall.

I figured I'd go see Rafferty first. I might be able to provoke him into another major slip. At least I could figure something from his reactions to a couple of loaded remarks. If that failed, I'd have to comb the personnel records for the third man. That might be hopeless. I was sure he wouldn't be there under his own name, and Rafferty would have rigged his security check.

I was thinking so hard I forgot Max Kagan. That was my mistake because Kagan never forgot a thing. An agitated

assistant manager grabbed me in the hotel lobby.

"Mr. Hawk, sir," he bleated, "I wish you'd do something."

"Drop dead?" I said.

"Oh, no sir. It's about Mr. Rafferty. He went upstairs half an hour ago with two of Mr. Kagan's friends, and he hasn't come down. There've been peculiar, uh, noises through the door of the suite. I was about to call the police when you came in, sir."

"Why not knock on the door?"

I knew why not.

"Oh, no. Not Mr. Kagan's door. I couldn't do that."

"You could have called the cops," I said. "Well, never mind. I'll go up right now. I'm sure everything's all right."

I was already headed for the elevator.

Max Kagan opened the door for me himself. His cigar had gone out. His face was flushed and his eyes all lit up as if he'd been with a woman.

"I was about to call you, Johnny," he said. "We got your case all solved and wrapped up. You was slow, so we done it my way."

"I told you to sit tight, Max," I said. I was trying to see past him into the room. "This hotel is my back yard. I do the solving here."

"It was my sister got hurt

playing in your yard," Kagan said. "When it's my own sister I don't wait for anybody. You wait till you hear what this bum did, Johnny. He even took a shot at you."

"What else is new?" I asked. "I knew he shot at me. A fat lot of good it did him. Now let me in there, Max."

Kagan stepped aside, and I went on in. Right away I saw what had given Max that sated-sleepy look. Max has always been a sadist, and he'd just had his kicks for the week.

They had Smooth Rafferty tied to a chair, and he didn't look smooth any more. He'd had the full treatment. I knew why peculiar noises came through a supposedly sound-proofed door. His face was pulped and a couple of teeth had been yanked out with a pair of bloody pliers. His left hand was ruined. They'd rammed toothpicks under the finger nails and set them on fire. One of the boys must have been a specialist. They'd done other things I don't even want to remember. He looked at me out of his ruined face.

"You see, Johnny." There was a note of real pride in Max Kagan's voice. "When I work them over, they spill their guts. A beautiful job the boys did. He's your man, and I left him alive like you said."

I was trying not to be sick on the rug. I've been around, but every man has his limit. Somehow I managed to shift position so that Max and his three boys were all in front of me. They didn't notice.

When he realized I wasn't going to say anything, Max Kagan went on. He picked some sheets of paper off the table—big sheets all covered with handwriting. "Here it is, Johnny. The confession. All of it. Everything, even how he killed some broad last night. It's all in his own hand. He wrote it out and signed it. You take this and the cops hang him."

"Haah!" It was a hoarse croak, and it came out of the wreck of Smooth Rafferty's face. But it still held a note of awful derision. "You tell 'em, Johnny."

"Shut up you," Kagan said. "Tell me what?"

I managed to choke down the words I wanted to use.

"He means", I said, "to tell you stupid, murdering, mini-brained bums you've blown the whole works. Right out the window you've blown it."

Somehow Kagan managed to look hurt. "You shouldn't call me names like that, Johnny. It ain't nice. Besides I've blown nothing. He told the truth in this confession. I knew he told the truth."



"Sure he did," I said. "Sure he did. So you got six sheets of paper you can blow your nose on. You mean you don't know that?"

"Know what?"

"Don't you ever read the papers?" I said. "Or don't you believe what you see? The minute a judge sees that confession with blood spots on the paper and hears how you got it, he'll throw it out of court. You just violated so

many civil rights I think maybe the State will have to apologize to Rafferty."

"I don't get it, Johnny."

"Oh, hell, Max. I mean after this business you pulled he can't even be indicted. No court in the country can use this kind of confession any more. That's why he spilled so much. All this does is put him in the clear."

"We'll tear it up and he can confess again to the cops."

"Don't be silly, Max. If the cops see him now they'll arrest you."

"It ain't right, Johnny," Kagan said with absolute conviction. "Sure I know cops got to let a bum call his lawyer, but I'm no cop. For once I'm an honest citizen helping the fuzz. And it's a real model confession. He spills the works. Did you know he had a girl in the office to help him? And he's got Bigear Willie from K.C. planted in this trap as a maintenance man to do the strongarm for him. He could carry his gun and white coat and the loot in his tool box and go anywhere in the place without bein' spotted. It's all here in his own hand."

"I wish we could use it," I said. "How I wish we could. But you know we can't, Max. Cop or no cop, the law reads the same for all. I'm sorry, Max."

"I'm sorry too, Johnny. Real sorry. Because I ain't lettin that bum walk away free."

I got set. "I was afraid you'd see it that way, Max. You know I can't let you kill him."

"Let me, Johnny? Just how you gonna stop me?"

The boys started to get ready to move into the act. For the first time they noticed that all of them were in front of me. For them, it was out of character.

"There's four of us, Johnny," Max said. "Four of us."

Two of the boys had their coats off and their heaters in plain sight in shoulder holsters. The third had a belt holster bulge under his jacket, left side for a cross draw. I figured Max Kagan was armed too. All I had was the little .38 S&W. That load has to be aimed carefully—the slug has too little punch to knock a grown man off his feet. I was under-gunned and knew it. Luckily they didn't.

"There's four of you," I said. "The first two to move are dead right now. I'd like to try for four."

"Johnny!" Kagan was shocked. "You bug me. You eat on all of us. You should be afraid. Why ain't you afraid?"

"I'm scared white," I said. It was true enough. "But not scared enough to stop. All you

can do is kill me, Max. You can't eat me. That's the secret of Johnny Hawk."

There was another of those awful, hoarse croaks from where Smooth Rafferty was tied. "Go on and kill each other, boys. I could use a good belly-laugh."

He stopped and for a long minute nothing else happened. I could feel the violence build up in that room the way a summer storm builds in the night. Any little thing could touch off the lightning.

The important thing was it gave me a few seconds to think. When a man has time to think, he gets answers.

"Hold it, Max," I said. "Nobody's got to be killed. We've got this bum even without his confession. We don't need his confession."

"Tell me, Johnny."

"I was a fool not to see it

before. Send a couple of the boys to bring Bigear Willie up here. Give him a long look at his boss. Explain how you come into this and that we know the whole story. Then we let the cops have Willie. He'll spill his guts all legal and proper. It won't matter what Smooth Rafferty says or doesn't say. Willie's got more to lose by not talking than by taking his share of this rap. After all, he wasn't in on the murder part."

Max Kagan thought it over. Then he laughed.

"I was just about to suggest that, myself," he said.

"All clear then, Max?"

"For now, yes," Kagan said. "You're still lucky, Johnny. You're riding seven all the way. But you shoudn't bug people, Johnny Hawk. Some day you'll push your luck too far."

"*Hasta manana*," I said. "Let's have a chat with Willie."

In the Next Issue:

THE METHODICAL COP

Introducing Sergeant Renzo DiLucca

by BILL PRONZINI

It was a house of hate, peopled by men who had known Murder intimately and too well. Could I get in there unseen—and out of there alive? Don't miss this sensational novelet. It's one of Bill Pronzini's best.

A Novelet of Nightmare Terror.



COUNTRY FOR SALE

*Alone, without hope, a lost paradise
fought against the Mafia horde which
had ravished her. Could I save that lost city?
Only time—and a few bullets—would tell.*

by **GEORGE G. CHESBRO**



I ROLLED OVER in the dark and swatted the button on the alarm clock. Nothing happened. The jangling continued, bouncing around inside my like marbles in a tin cup. The hands on the clock said three-thirty. I picked up the telephone and the ringing finally stopped. I pulled the receiver down near the vicinity of my mouth and muttered something unintelligible.

"Mongo? Is that you, Mongo?"

I rummaged around inside my mind until I managed to match the voice to a seven-foot giant with a penchant for collecting sea shells. I hadn't seen Roscoe Blanchard in five years, not since I'd left the circus.

"Roscoe?"

"Yeah, it's Roscoe." The voice was strained, nervous.

"Sorry if I woke you up. I know it's close to midnight."

I looked at the clock again. It still read three-thirty. "Roscoe, I think you need a new watch."

"Huh?"

"Where are you?"

"San Marino."

"California?"

"No. San Marino."

"I got that. But where's San Marino?"

There was a long pause at the other end of the line.

"San Marino's in *San Marino*," Roscoe said at last.

I decided to leave the geography lesson for later. "Roscoe, what's the matter?" I asked him.

"We've got trouble here and nobody knows what to do. I remembered Phil mentioning something about you being a private detective now. I got your number out of one of the books in the office."

"Where's Phil?"

"He's disappeared."

That woke me up. Phil was Phil Statler, owner of the Statler Brothers Circus, where I'd spent eight of the most miserable years of my life. But there aren't that many things you can do when you're a dwarf. If you end up a circus performer, there's no better man to work for than Phil Statler.

"How long has he been missing?"

"Four days. And there are some other funny things going on. Just yesterday—" It ended in a bloody gurgle and the muffled sound of something very large and heavy falling.

"Roscoe!" I was screaming at a dial tone; the line had been disconnected. I tasted blood and realized I had bitten into my lower lip. I lay frozen, my fingers locked around the receiver.

I sat up on the edge of the bed and leaned forward to stop my knees from shaking. Somewhere at the opposite end of thousands of miles of wire a man was dead or dying, and all I had was the name of a place I'd never heard of. I dialed the operator.

It took ten minutes to confirm that the call had come from a place called San Marino and another ten to find out where it was: San Marino, a full-fledged United Nations member, was a country which occupied the whole of a mountain-top—Mount Titano—in Italy. That was all the information I was going to get; I couldn't get through to a police station, or anyone else for that matter, because the San Marinese phone system had suddenly broken down and the phone people couldn't tell me

when it would be operational again. I would just have to live with the sound of Roscoe's dying.

I brushed my teeth and packed a bag.

I MET AN Italian on the flight to Venice who filled me in on San Marino.

San Marino seemed to be doing quite well despite the fact that I'd never heard of it. It was—well, a dwarf, the smallest and oldest republic in the world, sixty square kilometers with 19,000 people, about enough to fill the football stadium in a small college town. It had been around since 300 A.D. when a Christian stonemason by the name of Marino hid out on Mount Titano to avoid being fed to the Roman lions.

San Marino's geography consisted of nine towns and three castles which a Hollywood movie company had helped renovate in the '40's. Its economic assets included heavy doses of authentic medieval atmosphere, huge bottles of cheap cognac, postage stamps and a thriving tourist trade.

It seemed a strange place to take a circus.

I landed in Venice and rented a car. The drive to the coast town of Rimini took a little over an hour. By then it

was noon. I was tired from the Atlantic crossing, and hungry. Most of all I was worried, but there didn't seem to be much sense in rushing at this point.

I stopped in a *ristorante* to exercise my Italian and ordered some pasta and wine. Once my raven-haired waitress got over the fact that she had an Italian-speaking dwarf in her *ristorante*, I received excellent attention. The food and wine were superb. I finished, then asked directions to San Marino. She took me over to a window and pointed east.

Mount Titano was barely visible. I could make out San Marino's three castles sitting on the highest points of the mountain, silhouetted against the sky. It looked like something out of a Disney movie.

I turned away from the window and caught the waitress staring at me. She giggled nervously and dropped her eyes.

"I take it you don't get that many dwarfs around here," I said in Italian.

"I didn't mean to stare."

I introduced myself. Her name was Gabriela. I asked if I could use her phone and she steered me into a back room. I got hold of an operator who informed me that the lines to San Marino were still out. I

hung up and went back into the dining room, where Gabriela was waiting with a glass of cognac. I drank it in the name of international relations and thanked her. It tasted terrible.

"San Marinese," Gabriela said. "I thought you might like to taste it. They sell it by the gallon up there."

I disguised a belch with a noncommittal grunt.

"Did you reach your party?"

"The phones up there are out of order."

Gabriela absently stroked her hair. "That's odd. Come to think of it, nobody's been down off the mountain in two or three days."

"Who usually comes down?"

"Many San Marinese work in Rimini. They often stop in here for lunch or dinner. I have regulars, but I haven't seen them for three days. I guess there may be something to the rumors."

"What rumors?"

"It is said they have sickness. They are keeping themselves isolated until they find out what it is and how to cure it."

"What kind of a police force do they have up there?"

"Oh, they're all very nice."

"That's great for public relations. How effective are they?"

She gave me a puzzled look. I rephrased the question. "How

good are they at catching crooks?"

Gabriela laughed. "There is no crime in San Marino. Perhaps an occasional drunk or a traffic accident, but never anything serious. The San Marinese are very pleasant people. Very friendly. It will be a shame if you can't get in."

"How do I get up there?"

Gabriela went back to the window and pointed up the road. "The road branches off about two kilometers to the south. The right fork will take you to Mount Titano."

I paid my bill, left Gabriela a few hundred lire and returned to my car.

THERE WERE two guards at the border. One of them stepped out into the middle of the road as I approached. He couldn't have been more than twenty, but the scatter gun he held made him seem older. The other one stayed back, watching me through cold, mud-colored eyes. He was tall, swarthy, and looked decidedly unfriendly. I doubted that he'd ever directed traffic.

The boyish one came around to my side of the car and cleared his throat.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said in passable English. "The border is closed."

"I didn't think that ever happened in San Marino."

"There is sickness on the mountain." He dropped his eyes as he said it. "Very bad. We have closed ourselves off to protect others."

"I understand it's only catching if you're a telephone."

He gave me a sharp look, filled with warning.

"I've had all my shots. I'd like to take my chances."

"I'm sorry, sir. Perhaps in a few days."

I backed my car around and drove back down the hill. I parked it in a service station at the foot of the mountain and gave the attendant some money to watch it for a few days. From what I'd seen, San Marino wasn't exactly impregnable; it was time to test its new border fortifications. I found a convenient vineyard and ducked off the road into it.

I took the vineyard route three quarters of the way up the mountain, past the guards, then turned left and walked until I hit the main highway. That was all it took to get into San Marino. Staying there might prove more difficult, but I'd worry about that when the time came.

I found myself on the outskirts of a town which I recognized from the Italian's description as the country's



capital, also named San Marino. The central thoroughfare was a narrow, cobblestone street lined on both sides with souvenir shops. There were also a number of restaurants and hotels, not to mention the famous three castles, each about a half kilometer from where I was standing.

There was no sign of any circus.

I went up the street and stopped in front of one of the souvenir shops. Its windows were filled with the same things the windows of all the other shops were filled with; plastic junk with a medieval theme: plastic helmets, swords and shields, all undoubtedly made in Japan. There were three revolving stands displaying

glassine envelopes filled with San Marinese stamps. All of the usual postcards were already stamped, and there was a large wooden mailbox conveniently nailed to the side of each shop. Benches on each side of the entrance were loaded with glass jugs containing San Marinese cognac.

The San Marinese didn't miss a trick.

On the other hand, it didn't take much of an experienced eye to see that much of San Marino was authentically medieval. There was a church visible down a side street that had to be at least eight hundred years old, probably of great interest to historians. But the San Marinese had learned their lesson early and well; history doesn't make money, plastic souvenirs do.

A woman emerged from behind the tinted glass and stood on the stoop watching me as though I might be a souvenir that had somehow escaped from her shop. She had been beautiful once, before she'd put away too many San Marinese delicacies. Her green eyes were perfectly complemented by almond colored skin and dark hair.

Finally she smiled and said: "American?" It was as perfect as English can be when laced with a Brooklyn accent.

I extended my hand. "My name is Bob Frederickson."

"I'm Molly Marinello," the woman said, taking my hand in a firm grip. Her eyes glittered with pleasure. "Please wait here a moment, Mr. Frederickson. My husband will want to meet you."

She went back into the shop and reappeared a few moments later with her husband in tow. He was a big, handsome man with the ruddy complexion and granite presence of a man who has spent most of his life out-of-doors, working with his hands.

"I'm John Marinello," he said, pumping my hand. "Always glad to meet another American."

"Brooklyn?"

"Yeah. Can't say enough about the United States."

"Too much violence," his wife said gently. "Nobody's safe on the streets."

John Marinello shook his head. I felt as if I'd stumbled into an argument that had been going on for years. It was a ritual, and they knew their lines by heart.

"I earned good money there. I was a construction worker. Stone mason. I'd still be there if it wasn't for Molly. Great place, the United States."

"Too much violence," Molly repeated. "Nobody's safe on

the streets. Much better here."

Her husband started to shake his head again.

I cut in. "I take it that things are pretty quiet here."

John Marinello's eyes grew big in mock wonder. "Quiet?! Let me tell you—"

"Peaceful," Molly said quietly. "Nobody fights here. People here live like human beings."

The man's head was starting to go again.

"I guess we used to be neighbors," I said quickly. "I teach at the university in downtown Manhattan."

Both of them looked surprised. "We thought you were from the circus," Molly said. She paused and flushed. "I'm sorry," she added quickly. "I just took it for granted."

"It's all right. As a matter of fact, I used to work for the circus. The one that's here now. By the way, do you know where they're camped?"

John pointed up the street. "There's a large field up there around the bend, to your right. It's down in a valley." He paused and studied me. "I'm surprised you haven't seen it."

"I just got here."

"I understood we were quarantined. How did you get up here?"

"Do you believe the story about the epidemic?"

John and Molly Marinello exchanged glances. They both seemed incredulous.

"Believe?" John said. "Why shouldn't we believe it? The order came directly from Alberto Vaicona, one of the Regents."

"He's the head of your government?"

"One of the heads. There are two Regents."

"Why are all the phones out of order?"

"It is nothing," Molly assured me. "These things happen. Whatever is wrong will be repaired soon."

"Uh-huh. Are they giving out shots or anything for this epidemic?"

"We've been told it isn't necessary for now," John said. Flecks of light which might have been suspicion suddenly appeared in his eyes. "Why do you ask these questions?"

I swallowed hard, trying to think positive. "There's a rumor that a man from the circus was hurt the other day, maybe killed."

"It's more than a rumor," Molly said. "It's a fact. It was one of the freaks; a giant. Killed by a knife in the throat."

My mouth went dry. Molly's eyebrows went up as though yanked by strings.

"Isn't it terrible? But that was an outsider killed by

another outsider. The man was murdered by somebody from the circus."

"Who?"

"A knife thrower called Jandor. They already have him locked up in the jail."

"They have witnesses?"

"No, but it was Jandor's knife that killed the giant."

I said nothing, but I was sure Jandor hadn't killed anybody. Like most men who earn their living with the tools of violence, he was personally a gentle man, even tender. And he wasn't mentally defective; if Jandor was going to kill somebody, he wasn't likely to walk away and leave his trademark sticking out of his victim's neck.

"Can't say enough about the United States," John said.

"Too much violence," Molly said.

I bought a souvenir, thanked them and left.

FROM THE rim of the valley the circus below looked drab, spent. The aura that almost always surrounds a circus was missing. The colors of the rented tents were all wrong; the whole encampment looked like a balloon that was slowly leaking air. A trio of armed guards posted around the campsite added to the depressing effect.

The men were empty hand-

ed, but the type of men I was looking at always wore guns. They might forget to put their pants on in the morning, but never their guns.

I put my hands in my pockets, mustered up enough spit to do some casual whistling, then merrily tramped off down the slope. Two of the guards glanced at me, then looked away apparently unconcerned. The man closest to me kept his eyes riveted on my chest. I walked up to him, nodded pleasantly, then started to walk past.

A hand like a pair of wire cutters reached out and grabbed my shoulder, turning me toward him.

"Who are you, pal?" he said in slightly accented English. He sounded like he was talking through a mouthful of marshmallows, as though somebody had walked on his tonsils. I gave him a hurt look and pointed toward the tents.

"Don't you recognize me?" I was hoping all dwarfs looked the same to him.

His eyes skittered across my face, up and down my body. Like most stupid men, the thing he feared most was appearing stupid.

"What the hell are you doing out here?! Where's your pass?!"

I groaned apologetically and started rummaging through my

pockets. After a few moments of that number Marshmallow Mouth cursed and waved me through.

I walked quickly down the path and ducked behind one of the tents.

It was noontime and most of the circus personnel would be in the lunch trailers. That was fine with me. At least half of the circus would recognize me on sight, and I wanted to get the feel of things before holding any reunions. I needed somebody I could trust.

I slipped along the perimeter of the encampment to the Midway, then cut through to the compound where a number of trailers had been set up as living quarters for the performers and hands. I found the name plate I wanted, then knocked softly on the door of the trailer on the outside chance that its occupant would be in.

"Who's there?" The voice was nervous, edgy.

"It's Bob Frederickson, Nell. Let me in, please."

"Who?"

"Mongo."

The door suddenly burst open and Big Nell stood before me. Her beard was even longer than I remembered. She sobbed, jumped down to the ground and hugged me. There were tears in her eyes.

"Mongo!" Nell whimpered. "God, it's good to see you!"

The formalities out of the way, I gently pulled myself loose and let the air rush back into my lungs. We went into the trailer and Nell started to brew some coffee. Her shoulders were still shaking. Big Nell was very emotional, Earth-Mother to all the circus creatures, human and animal alike. I'd always liked her.

Nell finished brewing the coffee and brought cups for both of us on a tray. She poured cream into mine.

"I'm so glad you're here, Mongo," she said, handing me the cup. "So many things are happening here that I don't understand."

"Roscoe didn't understand them either. I'm here because he called me. The trouble is that I never got a chance to hear what he had to say."

Molly looked up and her eyes flooded again with tears. "Roscoe's dead, you know."

"Who killed him?"

"The police say Jandor."

"Do you believe that?"

Nell shook her head. "As far as I know, Roscoe and Jandor never exchanged a word in anger. If you want my opinion—"

"I do, Nell," I said gently. "But first I want a few facts. Is anybody in the circus sick?"

Nell thought a few moments.
"Just a few colds."

"What's the Statler Brothers Circus doing camped out in rented tents in the middle of San Marino?"

"We were invited by the government. Mr. Statler got a letter from one of their leaders—"

"A Regent?"

"Yeah, I guess that's what they're called. We were touring through Italy anyway, and Mr. Statler thought it might be fun to come to San Marino. He never said anything about selling the circus."

"Selling the circus?"

Nell blinked. "Didn't Roscoe tell you?"

"Roscoe was killed while he was talking to me on the phone. Did Phil say why he sold the circus?"

Nell wiped away a tear with the back of her hand. "Nobody's talked to Mr. Statler at all. He's disappeared. Mr. Fordamp said he's gone off on a vacation."

"Who's this Mr. Fordamp character?"

"He's the man Mr. Statler sold the circus to."

"Can he show papers?"

"He's got papers. I don't know whether they're any good or not."

"If Fordamp claims everything's on the up-and-up, how

does he explain the three gorillas outside?"

"Mr. Fordamp says the men are there for our protection; so that no one will steal anything."

I mulled things over in my mind for a few moments; nothing made any sense. The gunmen outside were all hard professionals, which probably made Fordamp the typical Big Man, supercrook, probably Syndicate.

What would a man like Fordamp want with a circus, and why would he blockade a whole country to get it? That was like boarding up a house to catch a fly.

"Nell, why do you suppose the government of San Marino would issue an invitation to the circus?"

"That's easy. Danny Lemon-gello took care of the arrangements."

The name was new to me and I said so.

"Danny has a balancing act," Nell continued. "He's been with the circus for two years now. It seems he's originally from San Marino. When he heard we were touring through Europe, he got the idea of performing in San Marino. He went to Mr. Statler and Mr. Statler said it would be all right if San Marino would agree to provide facilities. You know Mr. Statler: he collects

countries. Anyway, we came and set up. It was wonderful. I think at one time or another every person in San Marino came to see us.

"Then, right after we closed, Mr. Statler disappeared. Mr. Fordamp showed up the next day and told us that he'd bought the circus. He said he'd honor all our contracts and asked us to stay."

Nell stroked her beard, adding an afterthought: "I suppose that was real nice of him. Where else would most of us go?"

"What kind of a man is this Mr. Fordamp?"

"Smooth," she said after some hesitation, "but a boss-man, if you know what I mean, the kind of man you don't argue with. He dresses strange. He's always wearing this funny kind of vest under his suit. Real bulky. I think he carries something inside it."

"Probably a gun."

"It's too big. It looks more like a walkie-talkie. And he's always got two men with him. They carry guns."

"Assuming Jandor was framed, why do you think they picked him to pin the murder on?"

"Jandor was doing a lot of talking. Same as Roscoe."

"What were they talking about?"

"They were saying that they didn't believe Mr. Statler really sold the circus. They thought the circus was being stolen, and that Mr. Statler had been kidnaped. They went to the police, but nobody would listen."

"Okay, Nell. Right now, you're the only person in the circus who knows I'm here. I want to keep it that way for the time being, with the exception. I want to talk to Danny Lemongello."

"Now?"

"Now. Can you get him here for me?"

Nell stepped forward and placed her hands on my shoulders. "Everything's going to be all right, isn't it?"

In the kind of wars men like Fordamp and his goons fought, prisoners were rarely taken. They rarely kidnaped anybody; it was easier to kill anybody who got in the way. I didn't want to tell Nell that, so I said nothing. After a few moments Nell turned and walked out of the trailer.

Danny Lemongello had hair the color of an Hawaiian sunset and a look of wonder about him, the fresh-faced aura of a young man who was still in awe of the circus. He stepped inside the tent and stared at me as I got to my feet.

"Mongo The Magnificent!"

he cried, rushing forward with one hand outstretched. "Gee, if you only knew how glad I am to meet you! You're like a legend around here!"

He almost made me guilty for my thoughts. I shook his hand. It was wet. "We can talk old times later, Danny. Right now I'd like to ask you some questions."

His eyes clouded. "Gee, Mongo, what kind of questions?"

"It looks like somebody's trying to take over my circus," Danny said.

Lemongello's eyes flickered to the ground, then climbed back up to my face. "You mean 'your circus' because you used to work—"

"No, Danny," I liked. "I mean my circus because I'm a part owner. Half, to be exact."

"I didn't know that," Danny said after a long pause.

"Is there any reason you should?" I asked evenly.

"Well, Phil and I talked some, especially during the past year, and I guess I'm surprised that he never mentioned that he shared ownership with anybody."

I glanced at Nell. She had retreated to a corner of the trailer and was stroking her beard. I glanced back at Lemongello. "You and Phil talked a lot, Danny?"

"Yeah. We were good friends."

"And you were the one who got the circus an invitation to come here?"

"Yes. I'm proud of the circus. Maybe Nell told you; I come from San Marino, and I guess I wanted to show off for the home town folks, so to speak. I'd already written a letter to Mr. Vaicona, one of the Regents, and he'd said it was okay. I talked to Phil, and the rest was simple. He went out of his way to get here."

"I keep on hearing about this Vaicona. There are two Regents, aren't there?"

Danny nodded. "Arturo Bonatelli is the other one. He's been on vacation for the past two weeks."

"Did Phil ever mention anything to you about selling the circus?"

Lemongello tapped his foot a few times on the floor. It was the gesture of a nervous man who was trying to appear thoughtful. "He first mentioned it to me about six months ago," Danny said at last. "He said he was getting tired of the grind and had enough money to live out a good retirement. I guess all he was waiting for was a good offer."

"Uh-huh. And he got one here, obviously."

"That's right. There's a Mr.

Fordamp who bought the circus."

"So I hear; Phil's half and my half."

"I don't know anything about that."

"What's all this business about sealing the country off because of an epidemic?"

"There's meningitis on the other side of the mountain," Danny said easily. "Nothing too serious, but San Marino's whole economy is based on tourism, so they want to make sure nothing happens to any visitor. I'm sure the quarantine will be lifted in a few days. By the way, how did you get—"

"One more thing, Danny. Doesn't it seem strange to you that Phil would leave without saying good-bye to the people he'd worked with over the years?"

The boy thrust his hands in his pockets and studied my face. I imagined I could hear him making up his next lie in his head.

"The last time I talked to Phil he was pretty strung out," Danny said tightly, avoiding my eyes. "He was really anxious to get started on his retirement. I suppose leaving the way he did was just his way."

"But that isn't his way," I said evenly. I waited for Danny to say something. He remained silent. "I think somebody's



trying to pull a swindle, Danny. What do you think?"

He said something, but I didn't really listen to his answer. I was sure Danny Lemongello was lying; and if he thought at all, he wouldn't have put himself in a situation where he would have to lie. His mouth stopped moving and I slapped him on the back, thanked him, and ushered him out of the trailer.

I DECIDED it would be pushing my luck to try talking my way past Marshmallow Mouth again so I made my exit from the circus through a small patch of weeds in back of Nell's trailer. I climbed out of the valley, then headed toward a

police station I had seen on my way through town.

The entrance to the station was manned by a handsome San Marinese policeman who looked more than a little embarrassed about the whole thing. He had a clear-cut face, firm and honest. We nodded to each other as I passed inside.

It wasn't much of a police station, as police stations go; small, very old, obviously not intended as a maximum security prison, but as a way station for the occasional drunk who floated in on the cheap San Marinese cognac.

There was a man sitting inside. What I could see of him was dressed in expensive clothes. There was a big bulge under his right armpit. A pair of Gucci shoes with feet in them were propped up on a scarred wooden desk in front of a metal plate which read, *Chief*. The other end of him was hidden behind a newspaper. I went and stood in front of the desk. The paper didn't move.

"Who's in charge here?" I asked in Italian.

"I am," came the muffled reply.

"I want to report a missing person."

The paper came down slowly to reveal a pair of ice-cold black eyes. A jagged scar ran from his hairline down across the bridge

of his nose to the left side of his mouth. The scar tissue that had formed over the lip had puckered up his mouth into a perpetual leer. His name was Luciano Petrocelli, and he was an unlikely candidate for police chief; I'd last seen his picture in the *New York Times* in connection with an article describing how the Italian police were banishing certain suspected *mafiosi* to a small fishing village on an island off the coast of Sicily. Petrocelli was to have been the leading resident. The climate apparently hadn't agreed with him.

"How'd you get away from the circus?"

I repeated that I wanted to report a missing person.

"There aren't any missing persons in San Marino, buddy. Everybody is accounted for."

"Well, I don't think he's so much missing as kidnaped."

The brows came together and the eyes focused on my chest, like the cold, black barrels of guns.

"There ain't nobody been kidnaped in San Marino, dwarf. You're talking crazy."

"As long as I'm here, I'd like to visit a prisoner."

Petrocelli grunted and put the newspaper back up to his face. I had the feeling he was able to watch me through it.

"We don't have any prisoners in San Marino."

"I'm talking about the man called Jandor. He's supposed to have killed somebody. Don't you have him here?"

Petrocelli put the paper to one side and leaned forward in his chair. "He a friend of yours?"

"Yes."

"You've got some pretty dangerous friends, dwarf. Also, you ask too many questions. Why don't you take my advice and get out of San Marino?"

"I can't. You've got the country sealed off, remember? Also, there's the small matter of my missing partner selling a circus that's half mine. What are you going to do about that?"

A vein in the side of Petrocelli's neck was beginning to throb. I'd have ducked if he had a gun in his hand.

"If you're not out of here in one minute, dwarf, I'm going to throw you in the can with your friend."

I was out of the police station in something under a minute, and in the Marinello's souvenir shop in less than ten. Molly greeted me warmly and took me into living quarters in back of the shop to have some cognac with her husband. I passed on the cognac and offered a question instead.

"This is a nice little country

you've got here," I said. "What's to prevent somebody from taking it over?"

John Marinello tossed down one slug of cognac and poured another. His eyes were glassy.

"The law," he said. "We have a constitution, like in the United States. We elect our leaders. If they do not obey our laws we get rid of them."

"By voting them out of office, like in the United States?"

John put his glass down. He had a puzzled expression on his face. "That's right. Why?"

"Let's suppose for the sake of argument that someone, for reasons unknown, was in a hurry and didn't want to be bothered with a formality like an election. Let's suppose this person-or-group-wanted to fill all the key posts in San Marino with their own men. How would they go about it?"

Marinello shrugged. "They couldn't. The Régents, with the grand council, appoint all the officials who aren't elected."

"Men can be bought or blackmailed. There are many ways."

"Here that is impossible."

"But what would you do about it?"

"The Italians would help us."

"But only if they were officially asked, right?"

"Yes. What are you getting at?"

I thought I'd been making myself clear. I decided to hit him over the head with the whole package. "I think somebody's already taken over San Marino."

John put his glass down. His cheeks were still flushed, but his eyes cleared a little. "You're not making any sense."

"For openers, your chief of police at the moment is a *mafiosi* who was supposed to have been locked up by the Italians. There are hired guns all over the place. You've got no phone service, and the country's sealed off. It seems to me that you've got a problem."

"There's sickness in the country," John said weakly. "That's why we've been isolated."

"Really? Do you know of one single individual who's come down with this sickness?"

"I took it for granted."

"Like everybody else in San Marino."

Marinello put the cork back in the jug of cognac and pushed it away from him. "I read in the paper where a new chief had been appointed, but I didn't give it much thought. It was a new appointment, and it was made by Albert Vaicona himself."

"There's a second Regent,

Arturo Bonatelli. He's supposed to be on vacation. Can Vaicona make appointments by himself?"

"Yes, but the grand council has to approve."

"And the grand council approved a *mafiosi*?"

John shook his head. "Even if what you say is true, why would anybody want to take over San Marino? Our country is a joke to most people."

"I don't know. But I'm convinced that the brains behind it is a man by the name of Victor Fordamp. The circus comes into it somewhere, but I don't know how. It doesn't make any sense for a man like Fordamp to take over San Marino just to give your police chief a place to hide. Petrocelli is a big gun, but I don't think he rates a whole country. In any case, the big question is why your government is going along with it."

"That's assuming this whole plot isn't in your imagination."

"A man was killed while he was talking to me over the telephone, from here, asking for my help. That wasn't my imagination."

John mulled it over, then frowned. "We will have to fight."

"A lot of people could be killed."

Marinello flushed. "We are not cowards." "Of course not. But I hope you're not fools either. Fordamp and his men probably have enough firepower to outfit a battalion. They haven't used it because they haven't had to. That doesn't mean that they won't start firing if they're pressed. You can't fight bullets with your bare hands. How many guns do you have in San Marino?"

"We have a few hunters with rifles. And the police have their pistols."

"The men I've seen would eat you for breakfast, and all the police are playing follow the leader to Fordamp's men. Somebody has to go for the Italian authorities. It's risky, but not that bad. I got up here by walking through a vineyard. There's no reason someone can't go down the same way."

"I'll gladly do that."

"Not yet. We'll need more to go on than my suspicions. With the way things are in the world today, the Italian government probably won't be too anxious to send troops up the mountain unless we can prove there's a good reason."

John's eyes were cloudy with barely controlled anger. "I will take this man Petrocchio myself. And Fordamp."

"And you'll get yourself

killed. You sit tight until you hear from me."

"Where are you going?"

"To look for something to back us up."

I SLIPPED back onto the circus grounds and headed for Nell's trailer. The door was slightly ajar. I knocked on it three times.

"Run, Mongo! They're waiting—"

Nell's voice was cut off by the obscene sound of metal striking flesh. I heard Nell groan, then the sound of a man cursed and running toward the door. I crouched down, my back against the trailer, and waited for him. The door burst open and I caught a quick glimpse of Nell huddled by the door, her hand pressed to a deep gash on her cheek where a man standing above me had pistol-whipped her. Nell's beard was matted with blood.

Marshmallow Mouth started down the three steps leading to the ground. I caught him on the second step, grabbing his left ankle and lifting it. The somersault he executed wouldn't have won many diving points, but it looked beautiful to me. Marshmallow Mouth flipped and landed on his back with a delightful smack as the breath went out of him. The automatic pistol he was holding

popped out of his hand and landed harmlessly a few feet away.

He was helpless, his eyes glazed, so I didn't follow up with anything fancy; I stepped forward and kicked him in the jaw hard enough to put him on a liquid diet for about three months. The remaining lights in his eyes clicked out.

I picked up the gun and turned to go in the trailer. I froze in a crouch as three men emerged from around the side of the trailer. The tallest one had hawk-like features and bright, cocaine eyes. He was wearing a four hundred dollar sharkskin suit that clashed with the dusty circus grounds and the bulky vest he wore beneath it. The two men on either side were wearing guns, both of which were pointed at me.

"Drop your gun, Dr. Frederickson," Fordamp said. "You have a reputation for speed and cleverness. I assure you that my men will not underestimate you. If you even breathe funny you will be shot full of holes."

"And have the whole circus down on your neck?"

Fordamp didn't blink an eye. "Perhaps. But you will be dead. It will be an unfortunate situation for both of us."

I dropped the gun and straightened up. The two gunmen flanked me. I kept my

eyes on Fordamp. The expression on his face might have been a grin.

"Dr. Robert Frederickson," Fordamp said in the tone of voice of a man who was about to give a lecture. "Mongo The Magnificent, famous circus headliner, college professor, criminologist, private detective *extraordinaire*."

"You have good sources."

"Of course. A businessman can never know too much about those who might stand in his way. I don't suppose you've come to ask for your job back?"

"I'm here to find out why my partner sold my half of the circus out from under me."

Fordamp smiled again. "How much would you consider taking for your half of the business?"

"I'm not in the mood to sell out. I'd as soon stay partners with you. My guess is that this circus is suddenly going to start making a lot more money than it has been. What's the deal, Fordamp? What do you want with a circus?"

Fordamp made a clucking sound with his tongue. "That's a disappointing ploy coming from someone with your reputation, Dr. Frederickson. I've seen the ownership papers, so I know that you do not own any part of the circus. Still, you

are here. My guess is that you've come to interfere in my affairs."

"Why did you kill Roscoe, Fordamp?"

Fordamp absently touched the rectangular bulge in his vest but said nothing.

"Where's Statler? Did you kill him too?"

This time I got a reply of sorts; another clucking sound from Fordamp and a gun barrel on the top of the head from one of Fordamp's goons who had slipped behind me. The pain shot like a lightning bolt from the top of my head to my toes. The ground opened up beneath me, then closed over my head.

I clawed my way back up the sides of a hole that smelled like ether, crawled over the edge, and found myself propped up against a stone wall, staring into the grizzled face of Phil Statler. He had a dead cigar in a mouth framed by a stubble of steel-gray beard that had managed to foil every technological advance in razor blades. He had a look in his pale eyes that he usually reserved for sick elephants. I grinned.

"Hey, Phil, how's business?"

"Mongo," Phil growled, "you turn up in the damndest places."

"I got a call from Roscoe; he said there was trouble, so I flew

over. You can see how much help I've been."

Phil made a sound deep in his throat. "If I ever get out of here I'm going to kill a few sons-of-bitches," he said evenly. He might have been talking about buying a new car.

"Phil, Roscoe's dead."

Something passed over Phil's face. He rose slowly and turned away, but not before I caught the glint of tears in his eyes.

Now I could see the rest of the room; it bore a close resemblance to a dungeon. There was a single window with a clear view of nothing but sky, which explained why it was unbarred.

The man standing next to the window had the soft, handsome features of a San Marinese. He had a good deal of stubble on his face, but his dress was still impeccable. He still wore a suit jacket, and his tie was neatly knotted. His gaze was a mixture of curiosity and dignity in the midst of adversity; the whole impression added up to a man used to holding public office.

"Arturo Bonatelli, I presume?"

The man smiled. "Ciago," he said, then added in English: "Pleased to meet you."

Phil eyed the two of us. "You two know each other?"

"Only by reputation," I said.

"This is a strange place to take a vacation, Mr. Bonatelli."

Bonatelli grinned wryly. "Is that what they say?"

"That's what they say." I grimaced against the pain, rose and shook Bonatelli's hand. "I'm Bob Frederickson, Mr. Bonatelli. What's happening here?"

Anger glinted in Bonatelli's eyes. The emotion seemed out of place on his features, like an ink smear on a fine painting. "A man is trying to take over my country."

"I know that. Fordamp. Why?"

"I think he intends to turn it into a sanctuary for international criminals."

Things were beginning to fall into place; I kicked myself for not thinking of it earlier.

"Fordamp told us that he only wanted to use San Marino for a little while," Bonatelli continued, "long enough to make plans for getting Luciano Petrocelli out of Europe. Petrocelli has paid Fordamp a lot of money. But if it works once, why should it not work many times?"

"That's why you're here?"

"Yes."

"What about the circus?" Phil said. "There ain't no money in the circus."

"The circus is his transportation vehicle," I said. "Hiding a

man in San Marino is one thing; getting him in and out is something else again. It won't work forever, but it will work long enough to make Fordamp a tidy profit. At least Fordamp thinks so." I turned to Bonatelli. "Why didn't the other resist?"

"It isn't because they are cowards," the Regent said quickly. "It is because they fear for their country, and I did not agree with them on which was the best way to meet the threat. You see, despite the plastic souvenirs, San Marino itself is an authentic medieval treasure house. Most of the buildings are irreplaceable, and they contain countless art masterpieces. Without our churches, our art and our castles, we would be nothing more than a joke on a mountain."

"In addition, tourists would no longer come and our economy would be crippled. Victor Fordamp has placed dynamite charges in many of our buildings, including the castles. He carries an electronic detonator in a vest that he wears, and he has threatened to blow up everything we hold dear if we resist. If you've met him, you know that he always has two armed guards with him. It is impossible to take him by surprise."

Bonatelli was flushed with

anger, pacing back and forth in front of the window. "I too love everything that is San Marino," he continued. "But I do not believe we can allow ourselves to be blackmailed. Besides, I think Fordamp will blow up everything when he is finished with us anyway; such men cannot abide beauty. I argued that we had to find a way to resist. My opposition was reported to Fordamp, and I was locked up here with Mr. Statler, who refused to sell his circus."

I nodded and walked over to the window. As I'd suspected, we were locked up in one of the castles. I leaned out the window and looked down; the tops of a grove of pine trees were a hundred feet below. As I watched, a thrush winged her way to a nest built in the crevices between the stones that comprised the tower. I tried not to think of the fact that we were sitting on a charge of dynamite that could probably blow us all over the mountain-side.

"Why do you suppose they haven't killed the two of you?"

"I'm not sure," Bonatelli said.

"I'm thinking he hasn't gotten around to it," Phil said around his cigar. "Besides, having us locked up here gives him a little added insurance in

case he has to start threatening again."

I turned back to Phil and the Regent. "Assuming one of us could get out of here, what do you think would happen to the other two?"

Phil shrugged. "Things could get hairy, I suppose, but it would still be better to have one of us on the outside with a shot at Fordamp. As it is, we're simply sitting here waiting for the place to blow."

"That's obvious," Bonatelli said. There was a trace of impatience in his voice. "But the discussion is academic."

Phil removed the cigar from his mouth and spat into a corner. "Nothing's academic with Mongo."

"The door is two feet thick, and it's bolted. We are more than a hundred feet off the ground. How—"

"I think I can get out of here," I said. "Down the wall. But I'll be wasting my time unless there's some way I can convince the Italian authorities that we need them. Mr. Bonatelli, do you have anything I could show them as proof that I've been in contact with you?"

"I have my Regent's ring," Bonatelli said. "They would recognize that, I suppose, but you couldn't possibly climb down that wall. You'd fall to your death."

"He might make it," Phil said, eyeing me. He sounded as if he might be auditioning new talent. "I've seen him do even more amazing things in his act."

"Act?"

"Forget it," I said curtly. "Mr. Bonatelli, may I have your ring?"

The Regent slipped a gold, crested ring off his right hand and handed it to me. His hand trembled, and he had the air of an inexperienced prison warden giving a condemned man his last meal. I put the ring in my pocket, went to the window and climbed out.

Balance and timing, two skills that I had once had in abundance, were essential for the descent I planned to make; I hoped they hadn't atrophied in the five years I'd spent away from the circus.

A cold breeze was blowing off the top of the mountain, drying the rivulets of sweat that had already broken out on my body. I kept my head level, staring straight ahead at the niches in the rocks where I gripped with my fingers as I groped below me with my feet for the next toehold. Finding it, I would brace, then bring one hand down the wall until I found another handhold.

The thrush exploded in a whir of wings somewhere below and to my right. My peripheral

vision caught the faces of Phil and Bonatelli at the window above me; Bonatelli was bone white, his mouth gaping open as if the air at the top of the castle was too thin for him; Phil had the calmer expression of a man who has lived with the risks of death and maiming for a long time.

"Take it easy, Mongo," Phil growled softly. "There ain't no net under you."

"Wait until you get my bill for this exercise," I said without looking up. "I'll be able to buy a dozen nets, all fine-spun gold."

"You got a blank check, Mongo. A blank check. Just don't forget that I don't owe you nothin' if you get killed."

I cut the banter short; I was going to need my breath. I was barely a quarter of the way down and already the pain was spreading from the small of my back, around my rib cage through my arms and fingers, numbing them. I'd gashed my right hand, and the blood was welling between my fingers.

Despite the risks of slipping, I was going to have to speed my descent. Otherwise, I was going to run out of strength long before I reached the bottom, which meant that there'd be a neat, dwarf-sized hole at the base of a castle in San Marino.

I started taking chances,

accepting toeholds that felt spongy, digging my fingers into dusty pockets in the wall that could give way as soon as I touched them. One did, and for a few brief moments that felt like years I found myself dangling by one hand that had no feeling.

Phil's soft oath wafted down to me. I kept my eyes level, sucked in my breath, and swung back again. My other hand found a grip and my feet found solid footing. The muscles in my belly crawled, as if reaching out by themselves in an attempt to grasp the smooth rocks on the face of the wall. I didn't want to move; I wanted to stay there until all the feeling left and I dropped. I convinced myself that that wasn't positive thinking; I forced myself to calm down and continue groping. Then I could see the tops of trees out of the corner of my eye. I scurried down another twenty feet and fell the rest of the way, banging into the ground with a force that momentarily dazed me.

I half expected to hear a chorus of boos from some circus gallery. All I got was the croaking of a frog in the forest behind me. I shook my head to clear it, then took a quick mental inventory and decided nothing was broken.

I glanced up toward the

window. Bonatelli might have been a dead man; he was in exactly the same position—with the same expression on his face—that he'd been in when I'd gone over the window ledge. Phil was standing with his hands clasped over his head.

I got to my feet and slipped into the forest.

It was a clear day, and I could see Italy below me, through breaks in the trees. I needed a messenger. It was only a matter of a few hours before Fordamp would discover that I was missing, and things would start to come apart. On the positive side, Fordamp obviously didn't feel that secure of his position, or he wouldn't have felt the need to cut off the telephones and seal the country.

Regardless of what I did or didn't do, the fact that I had escaped from the castle would increase the pressure on Fordamp. I decided that I'd have to risk upping the ante some more, and hope that things in San Marino wouldn't start exploding.

That decision was given added urgency by a discovery I made in a small glen a few yards in from the tree line. Whoever had shot Danny Lemongello hadn't even bothered to dig a hole for him. Apparently Fordamp had found out that

Danny had talked to me; more probably, the boy simply knew too much. Whatever the reason, Danny's body lay sprawled on the grass. His glazed eyes were crossed, as if trying to see into the hole someone had put in the center of his forehead.

PETROCELLI didn't look exactly overjoyed to see me. His grossly swollen jaw dropped open when I walked into the police station. He was still fumbling around for his gun when I hit him on the side of the head with the heavy glass ashtray he kept on his desk. He slumped forward and his face smacked into the desk top with the satisfying sound of cracking egg shells. I took his keys and went back into the cell block.

Jandor was standing, gripping the bars of his cell when I came through the connecting door. His eyes widened. He'd put on some weight since I'd last seen him, and it all looked like muscle. He was a broad-shouldered man with surgeon's hands that could flick a blade of steel and shave a rose petal at fifty feet.

"Mongo!"

I grinned and unlocked the cell door. "Exercise time, Jandor."

"What?"

"No time now to tell you how I got here, Jandor. We've

got a lot of work to do, and not much time to do it in."

I opened the door of the cell. Jandor didn't move. He seemed dazed; he stared at the open space between us as if it was a barrier he couldn't ever cross.

"You must know about Roscow and my knife in his neck. How do you know I didn't kill him?"

"I've got a better suspect."

"Petrocelli killed him," Jandor said defensively.

"How do you know?"

"He bragged about it. He thought it was a big joke that I should be locked up for a crime the chief of police committed."

I nodded grimly. "Let's get him back into the cell. The walls are pretty thick, and it will probably be a time before anybody comes looking for him."

Jandor went into the office, then dragged Petrocelli back to the cell. Jandor paused and looked at me.

"I'd like to hurt him," Jandor said quietly.

"Be my guest."

In one single, fluid motion, Jandor picked the unconscious Petrocelli up and flung him toward the steel bunk at the back of the cell. Petrocelli hit the bunk with the full force of his weight on his right shoulder. I heard it snap. He was going to

have some more pain when he woke up. I locked the cell and connecting doors, then motioned Jandor out the back of the jail, into an alley.

I filled Jandor in on what was happening, then gave him the Regent's ring and instructions on what to do with it. Jandor nodded and started off down the hill, into the forest. I headed in the opposite direction, toward the town.

I knocked lightly at the back door of the Marinello's souvenir shop. Molly, her front draped with a spaghetti-splashed apron, came to the door; the apron reminded me that I hadn't eaten anything in close to twenty four hours. Molly opened the door, but her welcoming smile faded when she saw the expression on my face.

"I have to talk to John, Molly, and I'd like you to hear what I have to say."

Molly, sensing trouble, hesitated a moment, but finally went to the front of the shop to get her husband. I was glad to see that John Marinello was clear-eyed. We sat around a small table while I told them what had happened to their country.

Molly's face grew progressively sadder and more tense, but she didn't interrupt. John's breathing grew short and sharp.

I finished quickly, then paused, searching for my next words.

"I know I have no right to ask you this," I said to both of them, "but I need John's help. Fordamp's trump card is the explosive charges he's planted in the castles and churches. If we take those away from him, he's relatively powerless. Also, it means that he won't be able to blow up your Regent and a friend of mine."

"Why John?" Molly's voice was barely a whisper.

"John said that he used to be a construction worker, specializing in stone masonry. My guess is that he knows something about explosives."

"I do," John said evenly.

Molly gripped her husband's arm. "The charges could blow up in your face."

"Yes," I said quietly.

John abruptly stood up. "Let's go, Mr. Frederickson. We're wasting time."

I waited, watching Molly. Her answer surprised me. "You go, John. Mr. Frederickson is right; we must fight."

Marinello and I headed for the door. Molly's voice came after us, incongruous, yet somehow reassuring. "I'll keep your dinner warm, John."

According to John Marinello, finding the explosives wasn't going to be as difficult as I'd first expected. Assuming

that the explosive charges had been placed by an expert, they would be found near the architectural centers of the buildings, where they would do the most damage. It came down to a matter of second-guessing the person who had originally planted the charges.

For practice, we started with the most secluded spot we could find, St. Francesco's Church, built in the fourteenth century. John outlined the search procedure he wanted to follow. He cautioned me for the tenth time not to touch anything I might find, then we split up.

Forty-five minutes later John found one of the charges. I rounded the corner of the church and saw him kneeling tensely beside a niche in the foundation wall, near the ground. He glimpsed me out of the corner of his eye and raised his hand, signaling me to stop. Then he reached inside the niche and slowly withdrew a bundle consisting of five sticks of dynamite lashed together. On top of the bundle was a small metal cannister which resembled a miniature soup can with the label torn off.

John set the dynamite gently down on the ground, then motioned me closer. He was shaking his head.

"There's the first charge,"

John said. "My guess is that there's another one in the same spot on the other side of the building. We'll have to keep looking."

I glanced at my watch. "It's taking too much time. With some luck, Jandor should be back with the Italian police in another hour or so. When that happens, I don't want Fordamp to have the option of blowing the place up."

"There's no way to go any faster," John said. "I'm sorry." He didn't have to add that St. Francesco's Church was only one of dozens of potential targets, not including the three castles.

I pointed to the cannister. "That's the ignition device?"

John nodded. "Radio controlled. Fordamp must have the transmitter with him."

"He does. Is there any way we can jam the frequency?"

"We don't have the equipment."

"Can he set them off one at a time?"

John studied the cannister. "I doubt it. I'd say they're set to go off all at once."

It seemed to fit Fordamp's disposition. If he couldn't get what he wanted, he'd leave everything of value in San Marino in ruins.

"How do you disarm it?"

John reached down and

unsnapped the cannister from a magnetic clamping device. It seemed simple enough.

"Is there enough there to blow up a castle?"

"Fordamp will have more there."

"Okay. I've got to go to the castles. I've got a friend in one of them."

"I'll go with you," John said, rising to his feet. "A man's life is the most important thing."

I heard a noise behind me and wheeled. Marshmallow Mouth and another one of Fordamp's men were standing a few feet away, their guns trained on John and myself.

I decided I'd rather die running than propped up against a tree. I made a gesture of resignation, then made as if to toss the dynamite at them.

They reacted as I'd hoped, instinctively stepping backward and throwing their hands up to their faces. I grabbed the detonator away from John, then leaped to one side and sprinted toward the corner of the building. A gun barked three times and bullets ricocheted off the stone, peppering my face with sharp chunks of rock. But there was no cry of pain from behind me, which meant that at least John had had the good sense to stay put. I made it around the corner of

the church and sprinted down an alley.

I had the dynamite and the detonator, but they made an unlikely weapon, one which I couldn't even control. Still, it was all I had. I tucked the dynamite under my arm, put the cannister in my pocket, then headed at a trot toward the castle where Phil and the regent were imprisoned. I had to make one last ditch effort at getting them out.

A moment later I heard my name in English. It was amplified over a loudspeaker.

"Frederickson! It's all over now! Come here! We have your friends!"

THE SOUND was coming from the direction of the circus grounds. A few San Marinese stopped and stared around, then moved on. Those who did understand English probably assumed that the words had something to do with circus business.

The message came at me again. More insistent.

I made my way across the town to the high ridge overlooking the field and crouched down in the tall grass. The scene below wasn't encouraging.

Fordamp, flanked by his bodyguards, was standing in the middle of the field. John

Marinello had a gun pointed at his middle. Jandor was there too, his hands tied behind his back. There wasn't going to be any last-minute cavalry charge; I was on my own, and things weren't looking up.

A few San Marinese, attracted by the loudspeaker, appeared on the ridge across from me. They were quickly shooed away by guilty-looking members of the San Marinese police force. Occasionally the men paused and cast glances at a well dressed San Marinese who I took to be Alberto Vaicona. Vaicona stood with his head bowed. The police kept dispersing the onlookers.

However, there were a few spectators who weren't so easily scattered. The circus people were coming out of their trailers and gathering in a knot at the western edge of the field. Big Nell was in their midst, moving around and whispering urgently. At a signal from Fordamp the guards moved toward the circus people, guns drawn. Nell signaled and the circus people moved—but not away, and not in the direction Fordamp had intended; they began to quickly fan out. In a few moments Fordamp and the others were encircled.

Once again the police seemed uncertain of how to react; it was obvious where their sym-

pathies lay, and it was even more obvious where the power lay. Fordamp, keeping an anxious eye on the circle, reached inside his vest and withdrew the transmitter. The device was about the size of a carton of cigarettes, with a red button in the center. Vaicona paled. The Regent walked quickly up to the policemen and spoke to them. Their guns rose.

I glanced over my shoulder at one of the three castles rising into the sky; all that stood between two men and eternity was one man's shaking hand. One push of that red button and the castle would come crumbling to the ground.

The valley below suddenly smelled of death; the tension was building to a peak. Sooner or later someone was going to make a move and bullets would fly. The button would be pressed. Fordamp was betting everything he had on the one last card he held in his hand, and I couldn't afford to call.

I pulled a few strands of long grass out of the ground and plaited a rope of sorts. I replaced the detonator on the dynamite, then lashed the whole package to my belt, at my back, just beneath my shirt. Then, trying not to think of what would happen if Fordamp pushed the button, I stood up

and immediately raised my hands in the air.

Even from that distance I could see Fordamp's satisfied grin. He put the transmitter back into his vest, then motioned for me to come down.

Dozens of eyes watched me as I worked my way down the slope. I moved through the circle and heard my name whispered. Big Nell was watching me with wet eyes; I smiled at her and passed on through.

I moved toward Fordamp, who raised his hand in a signal for me to stop. I stopped. He whispered something to a seemingly indestructable Petrocelli who grinned through his smashed jaw and reached inside the sling on his arm to produce a gun. I had the distinct impression that my death warrant had been issued.

Petrocelli stepped forward, his eyes swimming with hate, and waved his gun toward a grove of trees behind him. It was time to make a move, any move.

I walked forward until I was abreast of Fordamp, then lunged sideways into Fordamp. I locked my fingers around his belt with one hand and struggled to untie the dynamite from my belt with the other.

Fordamp gave me a startled look, then lifted me off the

ground and shook me like a rag doll, trying to break my grip.

The ring of circus people was closing in, led by Nell. Petrocelli fired a shot into the air and they stopped. All except Nell. She walked forward three more steps.

"You can't shoot us all!" Nell shouted at Petrocelli. Then she turned around to face the circle. "If we don't stop them, they're going to kill Mongo!"

Petrocelli got a shot off and Nell spun, grabbing at her right shoulder, and fell to the ground. Blood spurted from the wound, but she rolled over and started to get up. Petrocelli advanced on her, his gun pointed at her head. He froze when the guns of the San Marinese policemen swung on him.

Fordamp seemed to have forgotten that I was still clinging to his belt. He quickly reached into his vest and withdrew the transmitter again.

"Stop!" Fordamp called in a voice that was none too steady. "Stop instantly, or I'll push the button!"

By that time I'd had enough time to untie the bundle of dynamite. I let go of Fordamp's belt, then brought the dynamite around and stuffed it into the bulge of his stomach, something like a quarterback trying to hand a football to a reluctant

halfback. Fordamp looked down at his belly and gagged.

"You push that button and you end up jelly," I said with a smile.

Fordamp's lips moved; finally sound came. "You'll blow yourself up too, you fool."

"Getting shot, getting blown up; it's all the same to me, buster. This gives me much more satisfaction." I paused a few moments to let his imagination ponder this problem, then I said: "It's all over, Fordamp. Put the transmitter down on the ground."

Fordamp swallowed hard, then carefully placed the transmitter at his feet. Now it was Petrocelli who thought he saw his ticket out. He let out a cry and leaped toward the box. The policeman's bullet caught him in mid-air, slicing in beneath his shoulder blade and puncturing his heart. I reached down and scooped up the transmitter before Petrocelli's body landed on the spot where it had been.

One of the policeman had cut Jandor's hands free. I walked over and handed the transmitter to him. "Why don't you get this to a safe place?"

"Will do, Mongo. I'm sorry I couldn't make it to—"

"Forget it." I turned to John. "Can you disarm this thing?"

John Marinello nodded: "I think so."

They started off toward the haven of the forest. I turned back toward the center of the field. Vaicona was still standing in the same spot, his shoulders slumped, staring at the ground. I suddenly felt sorry for him; he had only done what he felt was necessary to preserve his country's treasures. Others had disagreed, and now Vaicona had been made to look like a fool, if not a traitor.

I suspected his political career was over.

Big Nell was being attended to. The police had herded all of Fordamp's gorillas into a tight knot and were guarding them; two men were dragging Petrocelli's body away.

Fordamp was still staring at his belly, apparently dazed, which may have explained why he wasn't being guarded. But Fordamp wasn't through yet; his eyes rose and settled on me.

"You!" Fordamp screamed, his eyes seething with hate, "I'll kill you!"

He reached into his vest and came up with a .38. The barrel came around and stopped in a line with my forehead. I stood still and stared.

I was too far away to do anything about it.

Jandor wasn't. He had turned at the sound of

Fordamp's voice and sized up the situation in an instant. His hand flew up, disappeared for a moment behind his head, then came forward in a blur of speed.

Fordamp's eyes widened; the gun dropped from his fingers as he reached up and tried desperately to pull the knife out of his throat. A moment

later he slumped to the ground, dead.

The valley was suddenly very still. An army of curious faces had begun to appear on the ridge. I stooped down and searched through Fordamp's pockets until I found a ring of keys. Then I turned and walked toward the castle on a hilltop in the distance.



MIKE SHAYNE Presents Next Month's Headliners:

SNATCH A DEAD MAN... by BRETT HALLIDAY

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A New Exciting Novelet

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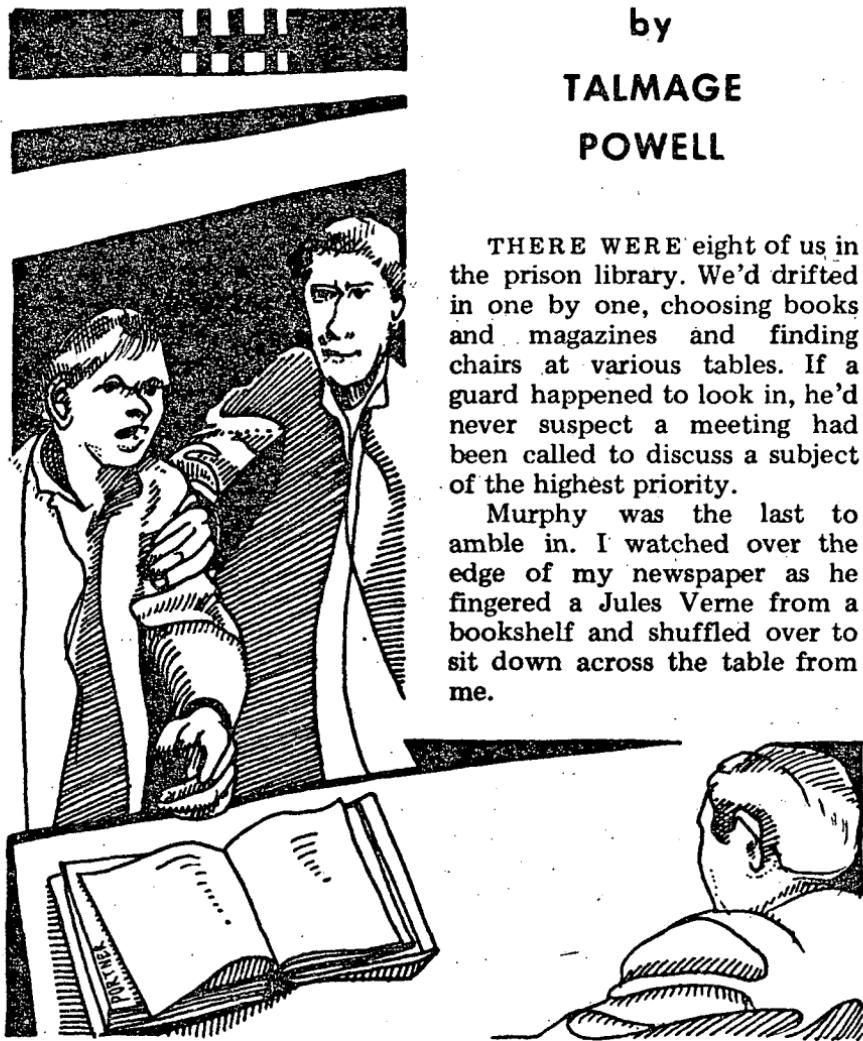
The New Detectives By Gaslight Classic

The way to freedom was open. Open for ever —unless a certain chick took a hand...

WELCOME HOME, PAL

by

**TALMAGE
POWELL**



THERE WERE eight of us in the prison library. We'd drifted in one by one, choosing books and magazines and finding chairs at various tables. If a guard happened to look in, he'd never suspect a meeting had been called to discuss a subject of the highest priority.

Murphy was the last to amble in. I watched over the edge of my newspaper as he fingered a Jules Verne from a bookshelf and shuffled over to sit down across the table from me.

Except for the missing face—Kowalski's—all were present and accounted for.

I called the meeting to order by clearing my throat. There was a rustle of news print, book pages, and shifting bodies as one and all gave me his attention.

"You know the problem," I said out of the side of my mouth in a whisper that razored all the way to Ordway, who sat furthest from me. "The parole board has met. And the lousy creeps have opened the front gate for Kowalski."

A mutter of sullen anger slipped through the reading room.

"At least Kowalski can't leave the state without breaking his parole," Myrick said, not moving his lips. He was a member of the team by virtue of his inclinations to write stacks of checks with other people's names on them.

"Beyond the walls and past the gate," Ordway pointed out, "Kowalski is like on the moon, far as we're concerned."

Ordway is a soft-spoken little guy with big ears and large round eyes. His mama had masterminded a fur warehouse job. Mama had got the furs, Ordway the rap. I was fond of Ordway. How many guys would go to such lengths for their mama?

"I didn't think the parole board would be so dumb," Murphy said. "Anybody can look at Kowalski and tell he's a ruffian."

Murphy certainly didn't look like one. He was a handsome, blue-eyed Irishman. He wasn't a crook, in the sense that the rest of us were. With a big bat and sticky glove, Murph had once second-based his way almost into the majors. Trouble was, he loved women. Just about all women. And any woman he loved, he felt he should marry. Free love is one thing. But the courts still take a dim view of bigamy. Murph was doing time on three counts.

"That don't cut no ice," Jellison said, a pickpocket without that finesse that separates the real pros from the better than average. Jellison was doing a long stretch this time, being a three time loser. "What the parole board has done, the parole board has done. Belly-aching about it won't help one damn bit."

"I'll give you a bellyache," Murph said.

"You and whose army?"

I tapped the table with my knuckles in the library quiet, restoring order.

Determined to have the last word, Jellison said, "Curly, inform Mr. Murphy that he should offer constructive sug-

gestions when he opens his big yap."

I ignored the crack and Murph let it pass. Kowalski's being on the outside was too important to waste time wrangling.

"The chair is open to suggestions," I said. "How do we restore Kowalski inside these walls where we can keep an eye on him?"

Nobody had any offerings for several minutes. The silence was broken only by the fussing of a bluejay in the tree outside the west windows. If the warden had dropped in right then, he'd have smiled in satisfaction, seeing eight of his boys apparently wrapped up in good literature.

Byers was the first to venture an idea. "I can bust Kowalski! I'll go to the warden and confess that Kowalski was with me on the last safe and loft job."

Mirrored in seven other faces, contempt for his idea withered Byers a little. His neck reddened.

"You mean the job where you parked your heap by a fire plug and waltzed out with the loot while a cop was writing you a ticket?" Murph inquired disgustedly.

Byers shot a withering look of his own. "So you got a better idea, Pretty Boy? Maybe

you could sick that little number, Darlene, onto Kowalski, the woman-crazy galoot."

Like that. From the mouths of babes, or dummies like Byers. The sudden inspiration jolted through the room and everyone was suddenly looking at Murphy.

"Now wait a minute!" his library voice was rising almost to natural pitch. "I wouldn't let a monkey like Kowalski in a thousand miles of a nice kid like Darlene!"

"So she's nice," Ordway said. "So is my mama. But Darlene knows the score. With his yen for feminine charms, Kowalski would be putty in her hands, to coin a phrase. She could lead him like Eve leading Adam to the apple tree."

"Into busting his parole," Jellison added, as if Ordway's suggestion needed clarification.

Murphy looked at me for help. "Curly, you're the brain in this outfit, the educated guy who could con his way into social circles, the keeper of the library. Tell these bohunks what a lousy idea it is!"

"Murph," I said with a sigh, "wish I could agree with you. But I think Byers has displayed a rare stroke of genius, perhaps the highest moment of his life. Darlene is the one weapon we have on the outside against Kowalski. He has met her

already. With the slightest encouragement from her, he would be foaming at the mouth."

"You guys make me sick! I think I'll go throw up. To ask me to ask a kid like Darlene—"

"Aw, come off it, Murph," Granger said, a once-successful off-track bookie. "It ain't like we was asking anything drastic. All Darlene has got to do is encourage him along a little until he breaks his parole."

"No," Murphy said, thumping the table top softly with his palm.

"For us, Murph," Ordway pleaded.

"No! In the first place, Darlene wouldn't do it."

"How do you know?" Byers asked reasonably. "You ain't even asked her yet. Visitors day is tomorrow. You could ask her tomorrow."

"No!" Murph stuck to his guns, although, feeling the strain of seven other overpowering presences, he was beginning to sweat.

"I know what's eating Murph," Jellison said.

"Yeah?" Murphy shot an angry look. "Like what?"

"Like you're scared to expose Darlene to a lady killer like Kowalski," Jellison shot back. "That's right, Murph. You think you're the end of all lover boys. But with his big,

rough, kind of ugly good looks Kowalski might make you look kind of pale. You're scared of the competition, boy, afraid of the contest."

Murph was in an angered crouch, halfway out of his chair. "Punk, any dame who takes my brand wears it for keeps. They never get over old Murphy-boy. I got wives the courts have never even heard about!"

"Yeah," Jellison needled, "you have to marry them."

I reached and grabbed Murphy's arm, my grip coaxing him back into his chair. "Easy, Murph. You want us all to draw solitary from brawling?"

"Well, okay," he said, tight-lipped. "But tell the punk to keep his yap shut! Darlene would stay true blue to me if Cassanola himself came along."

"Casanova," I corrected, and Jellison put in, "You got talk, Murph. But talk is cheap. I ain't seen you proving anything. If you got the guts, put up or shut up. Sick Darlene onto Kowalski and just see if her faithful appearances on visitors day don't shortly stop."

Murphy sat breathing thinly. He looked slowly from face to face. For him, it was a moment of being starkly alone, the pack waiting for his reaction.

"Okay," he snarled, "I'll show you. But just how is my



girl supposed to jerk the parole out from under Kowalski?"

"Well," Byers leered, "she could—"

"Oh, no!" Murph grated. "There are some measures to which I will not agree!"

"Sure, Murph," I placated. "And your terms are acceptable."

"So?" Murphy threw at me.

"So let me think a minute," I said. "Being more or less your captain, boys, I need a moment to crack a gray cell."

Everyone pretended to read, affording me more than a dozen moments. I found the factors conducive to clear thinking, the absolute quiet, the need to finger Kowalski, the urgency of the time element, and the prospect of a weapon on the outside in the form of a cute doll.

Unfortunately, I have not always thought so clearly in the

past, such as the time I perjured myself before a judge who did seem slightly senile. On that occasion I was trying to help a friend who had helped himself to sizeable company funds and needed an alibi. It was a greater misfortune not to receive my promised share of the aforesaid company funds.

I raised my head slowly and felt the room taking in and holding a breath.

I gave a nod to their expectant gazes.

"I have the solution," I announced. "Darlene is still working as a cocktail waitress in the same place?"

"Sure," Murph said. "Working. Paying her taxes. Visiting me every chance. And just counting the days until we can get a Mexican marriage license."

"Excellent," I said. "Then she will have no trouble in ruining Kowalski's parole. I predict that we shall see Kowalski within a week or two, if Darlene is as faithful as you say, Murph."

"She will prove the most faithful of all my wives," Murph said, now having built himself beyond fear of contradiction. "But just what is she to do?"

"Working in the nightclub, she will experience no trouble in making a connection," I said. "She is simply to buy a deck or

two of heroin, plant it in Kowalski's place of abode, and then simply place an anonymous phone call to his parole supervisor."

The simplicity and absolute workability of the scheme brought their nods and generous remarks of admiration. In here, at least, the well-mannered, well-spoken Harrison Currance Abbott, otherwise known as Curly, the repetitive failure on the outside, was top of the roster.

Darlene was every bit as good as Murphy's word, and my prediction as to Kowalski's return missed by only a couple of days.

We were gathered in the prison library when Kowalski came barging in. He looked rather glum at first. No one even dared to think about the chain of little events that had returned him here. For the eight of us, it would be a secret for all time to come.

KOWALSKI had figured an explanation that satisfied his own mind. As we broke library rules and crowded around him, he said, "Yeah, it's me. Lousy fuzz framed me. Planted some heroin in my room and nailed me for parole violation. That's why I'm back here."

Murph pounded Kowalski on the shoulder while I grabbed and pumped his hand.

"Tough break," Murph said, "but it sure is good to see you, Kowalski!"

Everybody murmured approval of that sentiment, and as he looked from face to face, Kowalski began losing his glum.

"Come to think of it," he said, his teeth glinting in the first stages of a smile, "it's not so bad seeing you monkeys either!"

I let out an easy breath. His experience seemed not to have unduly upset Kowalski psychologically. And that was important. As team captain, I was certainly counting on Kowalski to pitch us to another inter-prison championship.

"You got back just in time," I remarked. "Baseball season starts next week."

For a second, the merest glint of suspicion flicked across Kowalski's big face. But how could we have broken his parole? So now his smile came full blown and eager.

"I guess you bums were plenty worried by the thought of starting without me. You'd never get anywhere."

Which was the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.



SAM MOSKOWITZ

Introduces

THE THING INVISIBLE

by WILLIAM HOPE HODGSON

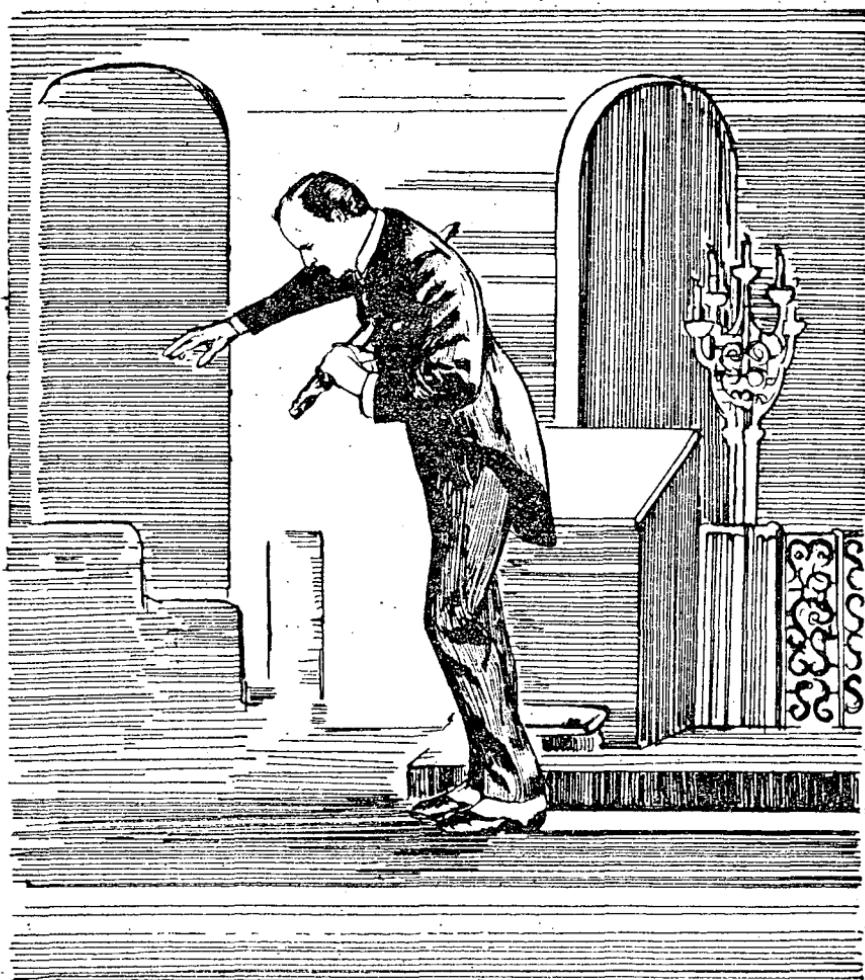
THE TRAPPINGS of the old gothic novels still clung to the early practitioners of the detective and mystery story and in the best of them, there was an attempt to create an aura of suspense, a feeling of impending horror and the expectation of a momentary torrent of terror. One of the real masters of horror as an element in detection was the late William Hope Hodgson. His major novels The Night Land and The Boats of the "Glen Carrig" have recently been published in paperback and a series of his splendid short stories, previously unknown in this country, are

now being reprinted in our new companion magazine, WEIRD TALES.

Carnacki was an extraordinary scientific detective, utilizing the most advanced modern methods for solving his cases. His specialty were those mysteries that were so strange and inexplicable as to seem to carry a note of the supernatural about them. Carnacki tackled them with an open mind and frequently found the explanation in the real world, but once in a while discovered that he was up against more than he could handle.

Six of the Carnacki stories

The man who started it all—the man who practically invented the ubiquitous private eye—had his instantaneous imitators—fortunately for us, or, all of those extraordinary sleuths and their remarkable stories might have remained still-born. Success bred rivals, and Sherlock Holmes' contemporaries will pass through these pages, ably selected and scholarly introduced by SAM MOSKOWITZ. Famed friends will ride hansom cabs once again.



were originally published in THE IDLER MAGAZINE in England, January to June, 1910 inclusive. This magazine was edited by Robert Barr, himself a noted detective story writer.

The Thing Invisible was the last Carnacki story published during the lifetime of William Hope Hodgson and appeared in the NEW MAGAZINE for January, 1912, an all-fiction British publication, much like the American pulps, that ran some of the best adventure and mystery writers of its time. This is a fine murder mystery in the classic sense, but what will impress the reader even more than the ingenuity of the plot or the detection methods of Carnacki is the author's genius for sustaining and mounting a true note of horror that becomes almost unbearable in its tension.

When William Hope Hodgson collected the seven stories for hardcovers under the imprint of Everleigh Nash, London, for publication in March, 1913, he made The Thing Invisible the lead story of the book; though it was the last to appear. The original edition sold for six shillings, but a cheaper edition selling for two shillings was issued by the same company in 1914.

However, there was a strange prelude to this volume. The six

Carnacki stories that had originally appeared in THE IDLER, were rewritten by Hodgson as a single short story and published as a paperbound book, only 14 pages long, selling for 25 cents by Paul H. Reynolds, New York, in 1910! Another edition of this, without the Reynolds colophon and with no price was made available in England the same year. Reynolds was a legitimate American publisher of paperbound books, but the question is raised as to why such a peculiar item. Was it possible that Hodgson was using this as a promotion piece to sell a hardcover book and footed the expense himself? The title of the booklet was Carnacki the Ghost Finder, and a Poem and the poem included was three stanzas long and entitled Lost.

After Hodgson's death, the London publisher Holden & Hardingham made a low-priced reissue of all of William Hope Hodgson's books and Carnacki the Ghost Finder was among them. When Arkham House did a limited edition of Carnacki The Ghost-Finder in 1947, its editor, August W. Derleth, added three previously unpublished stories, The Haunted Jarvee, The Find and The Hogg. Of the three, this researcher has discovered through location of the original manuscript that

The Find was originally not written as a Carnacki story. Instead, it was supposed to have been the vehicle for the creation of a new detective, and the original title was The Dumpley Acrostics and the sub-title "An Incident In The Career Of Sackwell Dank, Mental Analyst." When the story did not sell, Hodgson rewrote it almost entirely from end to end, substituted Carnacki for Sackwell Dank and

changed the title to The Find. That is the version which appeared in the Arkham House collection and it is some five hundred words longer than the original.

Hodgson dabbled in the mystery story most of his life, and aside from Carnacki, had published enough to make another volume at the time he was killed by a burst from an artillery shell while fighting a delaying action in World War I.

THE THING INVISIBLE

by WILLIAM HOPE HODGSON

CARNACKI had just returned to Cheyne Walk, Chelsea. I was aware of this interesting fact by reason of the curt and quaintly worded postcard which I was re-reading, and by which I was requested to present myself at his house not later than seven o'clock on that evening.

Carnacki had, as I and the others of his strictly limited circle of friends knew, been away in Kent for the past three weeks; but beyond that, we had no knowledge. Carnacki was genially secretive, and spoke only when he was ready to speak. When this stage arrived,

I, and his three other friends, Jessop, Arkright, and Taylor, would receive a card or a wire, asking us to call. Not one of us ever willingly missed; for after a thoroughly sensible little dinner, Carnacki would snuggle down into his big armchair, light his pipe, and wait whilst we arranged ourselves comfortably in our accustomed seats and nooks. Then he would begin to talk.

Upon this particular night, I was the first to arrive, and found Carnacki sitting, quietly smoking, over a paper. He stood up; shook me firmly by the

hand; pointed to a chair, and sat down again; never having uttered a word.

For my part, I said nothing, either. I knew the man too well to bother him with questions, or the weather; and so took a seat and a cigarette. Presently, the three others turned up, and after that we spent a comfortable and busy hour at dinner.

Dinner over, Carnacki snugged himself down into his great chair, as I have said was his habit; filled his pipe and puffed for awhile, his gaze directed thoughtfully at the fire. The rest of us, if I may so express it, made ourselves cosy, each after his own particular manner. A minute or so later Carnacki began to speak, ignoring any preliminary remarks, and going straight to the subject of the story we knew he had to tell:

"I have just come back from Sir Alfred Jarnock's place, at Burtontree, in South Kent," he began, without removing his gaze from the fire. "Most extraordinary things have been happening down there lately, and Mr. George Jarnock, the eldest son, wired to ask me to run over and see whether I could help to clear matters up a bit. I went.

"When I got there, I found that they have an old Chapel attached to the castle, which has had quite a distinguished

reputation for being what is popularly termed 'haunted.' They have been rather proud of this, as I managed to discover, until quite lately, when something very disagreeable occurred, which served to remind them that family ghosts are not always content, as I might say, to remain purely ornamental.

"It sounds almost laughable, I know, to hear of a long respected supernatural phenomenon growing unexpectedly dangerous; and in this case the tale of the haunting was considered as little more than an old myth, except after night-fall, when possibly it became more plausible seeming.

"But however this may be, there is no doubt at all but that what I might term the Haunting Essence which lived in the place, had become suddenly dangerous—deadly dangerous too, the old butler being nearly stabbed to death one night in the Chapel, with a peculiar old dagger.

"It is, in fact, this dagger which is popularly supposed to 'haunt' the Chapel. At least, there has been always a story handed down in the family that this dagger would attack any enemy who should dare to venture into the Chapel, after night-fall. But, of course, this had been taken with about the same amount of seriousness

that people take most ghost-tales, and that is not usually of a worryingly *real* nature. I mean, that most people never quite know how much or how little they believe of matters ab-human or abnormal, and generally they never have an opportunity to learn.

"And, indeed, as you are all aware, I am as big a sceptic concerning the truth of ghost-tales as any man you are likely to meet; only I am what I might term an unprejudiced sceptic. I am not given to either believing or disbelieving things 'on principle,' as I have found many idiots prone to be, and what is more, some of them not ashamed to boast of the insane fact. I view all reported 'hauntings' as unproven until I have examined into them; and I am bound to admit that ninety-nine cases in a hundred turn out to be sheer bosh and fancy. But the hundredth! Well, if it were not for the hundredth, I should have few stories to tell you—eh?

"Of course, after the attack on the butler, it became evident that there was at least something in the old story concerning the dagger, and I found everyone in a half belief that the queer old weapon did really strike the butler, either by the aid of some inherent force, which I found them peculiarly

unable to explain, or else in the hand of some invisible thing or monster of the Outer World!

"From considerable experience, I knew that it was much more likely that the butler had been knifed by some vicious and quite material human! Naturally, the first thing to do, was to test this probability of human agency, and I set to work to make a pretty drastic examination of the people who presumably knew most about the tragedy.

"The result of this examination, both pleased and surprised me; for it left me with very good reasons for belief that I had come upon one of those extraordinarily rare true manifestations of the extrusion of a Force from the Outside. In more popular phraseology—a genuine case of haunting.

"These are the facts: On the previous Sunday evening but one, Sir Alfred Jarnock's household had attended family service, as usual, in the Chapel. You see, the Rector goes over to officiate twice each Sunday, after concluding his duties, at the public Church, about three miles away.

"At the end of the service in the Chapel, Sir Alfred Jarnock, his son Mr. George Jarnock, and the Rector had stood for a couple of minutes, talking, whilst old Bellett the butler

went round, putting out the candles.

"Suddenly, the Rector remembered that he had left his small prayer-book on the Communion table in the morning; he turned, and asked the butler to get it for him, before he blew out the chancel candles.

"Now, I have particularly called your attention to this, because it is important, in that it provided witnesses in a most fortunate manner at an extraordinary moment. You see, the Rector's turning to speak to Bellett had naturally caused both Sir Alfred Jarnock and his son to glance in the direction of the butler, and it was at this identical instant, and whilst all three were looking at him, that the old butler was stabbed—there, full in the candle-light, before their very eyes.

"I took the opportunity to call early upon the Rector, after I had questioned Mr. George Jarnock, who replied to my queries in place of Sir Alfred Jarnock, for the older man was in a nervous and shaken condition, as a result of the happening, and his son wished him to avoid dwelling upon the scene, as much as possible.

"The Rector's version was clear and vivid, and he had evidently received the astonishment of his life. He pictured to

me the whole affair—Bellett, up at the chancel gate, going for the prayer-book, and absolutely alone; and then the *blow*, out of the Void, he described it; and the *force* prodigious—the old man being driven headlong into the body of the Chapel. Like the kick of a great horse, the Rector said, his benevolent old eyes bright and intense with the effort he made to make me see the thing that he had actually witnessed, in defiance of all that he had hitherto believed.

"When I left him, he went back to the writing which he had put aside, when I appeared. I feel sure that he was developing the first unorthodox sermon that he had ever evolved. He was a dear old chap, and I should certainly like to have heard it.

"The last man I visited, was the butler. He was, of course, in a frightfully weak and shaken condition; but he could tell me nothing that did not point to there being a Power abroad in the Chapel. He told the same tale, in every minute particle, that I had learned from the others. He had been going up to put out the altar candles and fetch the Rector's book, when something struck him an enormous blow high up on the left breast, and he was driven headlong into the aisle.

"Examination had shown that he had been stabbed by the dagger—of which I will tell you more in a moment—that hung always above the altar. The weapon had entered, fortunately some inches above the heart, under the collarbone, which had been broken by the stupendous force of the blow, the dagger itself being driven clean through the body, and out through the scapula behind.

"The poor old fellow could not talk much, and I soon left him; but what he had told me was sufficient to make it unmistakable that no living person had been within yards of him, when he was attacked; and, as I knew, this fact was verified by three capable and responsible witnesses, independent of Bellett himself.

"The thing now, was to search the Chapel, which is small and extremely old. It is very massively built, and entered through only one door, which leads out of the castle itself, and the key of which is kept by Sir Alfred Jarnock, the butler having no duplicate.

"The shape of the Chapel is oblong, and the altar is railed off after the usual fashion. There are two tombs in the body of the place; but none in the chancel, which is bare, except for the tall candlesticks, and the chancel rail, beyond

which is the undraped altar of solid marble, upon which stand four small candlesticks, two at each end.

"Above the altar hangs the 'waeful dagger,' as I had learned it was named. I fancy the term has been taken from an old vellum, which describes the dagger and its supposed abnormal properties. I took the dagger down, and examined it minutely and with method. The blade is ten inches long, two inches broad at the base, and tapering to a rounded but sharp point, rather peculiar. It is double-edged.

"The metal sheath is curious for having a cross-piece, which, taken with the fact that the sheath itself is continued three parts up the hilt of the dagger—in a most inconvenient fashion—gives it the appearance of a cross. That this is not unintentional is shown by an engraving of the Christ crucified upon one side, whilst upon the other, in Latin, is the inscription: 'Vengeance is Mine, I will Repay.' A quaint and rather terrible conjunction of ideas. Upon the blade of the dagger is graven in old English capitals: 'I Watch, I Strike.' On the butt of the hilt there is carved deeply a Pentacle."

"This is a pretty accurate description of the peculiar old weapon that has had the

curious and uncomfortable reputation of being able—either of its own accord or in the hand of something invisible—to strike murderously any enemy of the Jarnock family who may chance to enter the Chapel after night-fall. I may tell you here and now, that, before I left, I had very good reason to put certain doubts behind me; for I tested the deadliness of the thing, myself.

“As you know, however, at this point of my investigation, I was still at that stage where I considered the existence of a supernatural Force unproven. In the meanwhile, I treated the Chapel drastically, sounding and scrutinising the walls and floor, dealing with them almost foot by foot, and particularly examining the two tombs.

“At the end of this search, I had in a ladder, and made a close survey of the groined roof. I passed three days in this fashion, and by the evening of the third day, I had proved to my entire satisfaction that there is no place in the whole of that Chapel where any living being could have hidden, and also that the only way of ingress and egress to and from the Chapel is through the doorway which leads into the castle, the door of which was always kept locked, and the key kept by Sir Alfred Jarnock himself, as I

have told you. I mean, of course, that this doorway is the only entrance practicable to *material* people.

“Yet, as you will see, even had I discovered some other opening, secret or otherwise, it would not have helped at all to explain the mystery of the incredible attack, in a normal fashion. For the butler, as you know, was struck in full sight of the Rector, Sir Jarnock and his son. And old Bellett himself knew that no living person had touched him... *OUT OF THE VOID*, the Rector had described the inhumanly brutal attack. ‘Out of the Void!’ A strange feeling it gives one—eh?

“And this is the thing that I had been called in to bottom!

“After considerable thought, I decided on a plan of action. I proposed to Sir Alfred Jarnock that I should spend a night in the Chapel, and keep a constant watch upon the dagger! But to this, the old knight—a little, weasened, nervous man—would not listen for a moment. He, at least, I felt assured had no doubt of the *reality* of some dangerous supernatural Force a-roam at night in the Chapel. He informed me that it had been his habit every evening to lock the Chapel door; so that no one might foolishly or heedlessly run the risk of any peril that it might hold at night;

and that he could not allow me to attempt such a thing, after what had happened to the butler.

"I could see that Sir Alfred Jarnock was very much in earnest, and would evidently have held himself to blame, had he allowed me to make the experiment, and any harm come to me; so I said nothing in argument; and presently, pleading the fatigue of his years and health, he said good-night, and left me; having given me the impression of being a polite, but rather superstitious, old gentleman.

"That night, however, whilst I was undressing, I saw how I might achieve the thing I wished and be able to enter the Chapel after dark, without making Sir Alfred Jarnock nervous. On the morrow, when I borrowed the key, I would take an impression, and have a duplicate made. Then, with my private key, I could do what I liked.

"In the morning I carried out my idea. I borrowed the key, as I wanted to take a photograph of the chancel by daylight. When I had done this I locked up the Chapel and handed the key to Sir Alfred Jarnock, having first taken an impression in soap. I had brought out the exposed plate—in its slide—with me; but

the camera I had left exactly as it was, as I wanted to take a second photograph of the chancel that night, from the same position.

"I took the dark-slide into Burontree, also the cake of the soap with the impress. The soap I left with the local ironmonger, who was something of a locksmith and promised to let me have my duplicate, finished, if I would call in two hours. This I did, having, in the meanwhile, found out a photographer, where I developed the plate, and left it to dry, telling him I would call next day. At the end of the two hours, I went for my key, and found it ready, much to my satisfaction. Then I returned to the castle.

"After dinner that evening, I played billiards with young Jarnock for a couple of hours. Then, I had a cup of coffee, and went off to my room, telling him I was feeling awfully tired. He nodded, and told me he felt the same way. I was glad; for I wanted the house to settle as soon as possible.

"I locked the door of my room; then from under the bed—where I had hidden them earlier in the evening—I drew out several fine pieces of plate-armour, which I had removed from the armoury. There was also a shirt of chain-mail, with a sort of

quilted hood of mail to go over the head.

"I buckled on the plate-armour, and found it extraordinarily uncomfortable, and over all I drew on the chain-mail. I know nothing about armour; but, from what I have learned since, I must have put on parts of two suits. Anyway, I felt beastly, clamped and clumsy and unable to move my arms and legs naturally. But I knew that the thing I was thinking of doing, called for some sort of protection for my body. Over the armour, I pulled on my dressing-gown, and shoved my revolver into one of the side-pockets—and my repeating flashlight into the other. My dark lantern I carried in my hand.

"As soon as I was ready I went out into the passage, and listened. I had been some considerable time making my preparations, and I found that now the big hall and staircase were in darkness and all the house seemed quiet. I stepped back, and closed and locked my door. Then, very slowly and silently, I went downstairs to the hall, and turned into the passage that led to the Chapel.

"I reached the door, and tried my key. It fitted perfectly, and a moment later I was in the Chapel, with the door locked behind me, and all

about me the utter dreary silence of the place, with just the faint showings of the outlines of the stained, leaded windows, making the darkness and lonesomeness almost the more apparent.

"Now it would be silly to say I did not feel queer. I felt very queer indeed. You just try, any of you, to imagine yourself standing there in the dark silence, and remembering not only the legend that was attached to the place; but what had really happened to the old butler only a little while gone. I can tell you, as I stood there, I could believe that something invisible was coming towards me in the air of the Chapel. Yet, I had got to go through with the business; and I just took hold of my little bit of courage and set to work.

"First of all, I switched on my light; then I began a careful tour of the place, examining every corner and nook. I found nothing unusual. At the chancel gate, I held up my lamp and flashed the light at the dagger. It hung there, right enough, above the altar; but I remember thinking of the word 'demure,' as I looked at it. However, I pushed the thought away; for what I was doing needed no addition of uncomfortable thoughts.

"I completed the tour of the place, with a constantly grow-

ing awareness of its utter chill and unkind desolation—an atmosphere of cold dismalness seemed to be everywhere, and the quiet was abominable.

"At the conclusion of my search, I walked across to where I had left my camera focussed upon the chancel. From the satchel that I had put beneath the tripod, I took out a dark-slide and inserted it in the camera, drawing the shutter. After that, I uncapped the lens, pulled out my flashlight apparatus, and pressed the trigger. There was an intense, brilliant flash, that made the whole of the interior of the Chapel jump into sight, and disappear as quickly. Then, in the light from my lantern, I inserted the shutter into the slide, and reversed the slide, so as to have a fresh plate ready to expose at any time.

"After I had done this, I shut off my lantern and sat down in one of the pews near to my camera. I cannot say what I expected to happen; but I had an extraordinary feeling, almost a conviction, that something peculiar or horrible would soon occur. It was, you know, as if I knew.

"An hour passed, of absolute silence. The time I knew by the far-off, faint chime of a clock that had been erected over the stables. I was beastly cold; for

the whole place is without any kind of heating pipes or furnace, as I had noticed during my search; so that the temperature was sufficiently uncomfortable to suit my frame of mind. I felt like a kind of human periwinkle encased in boiler-plate and frozen with cold and funk. And, you know, somehow the dark about me seemed to press coldly against my face. I cannot say whether any of you have ever had the feeling; but if you have, you will know just how disgustingly un-nerving it is. And then, all at once, I had a horrible sense that something was moving in the place. It was not that I could hear anything; but I had a kind of intuitive knowledge that something had stirred in the darkness. Can you imagine how I felt?

"Suddenly my courage went. I put up my mailed arms over my face. I wanted to protect it. I had got a sudden sickening feeling that something was hovering over me in the dark. Talk about fright! I could have shouted, if I had not been afraid of the noise. And then, abruptly, I heard something. Away up the aisle, there sounded a dull clang of metal, as it might be the tread of a mailed heel upon the stone of the aisle. I sat, immovable. I was fighting with all my

strength to get back my courage. I could not take my arms down from over my face; but I knew that I was getting hold of the gritty part of me again. And suddenly I made a mighty effort and lowered my arms. I held my face up in the darkness. And, I tell you, I respect myself for the act, because I thought truly at that moment that I was going to die. But I think, just then, by the slow revulsion of feeling which had assisted my effort, I was less sick, in that instant, at the thought of having to die, than at the knowledge of the utter weak cowardice that had so unexpectedly shaken me all to bits, for a time.

"Do I make myself clear? You understand, I feel sure, that the sense of respect, which I spoke of, is not really unhealthy egotism; because, you see, I am not blind to the state of mind which helped me. I mean that if I had uncovered my face by a sheer effort of will, unhelped by any revulsion of feeling, I should have done a thing much more worthy of mention. But, even as it was, there were elements in the act, worthy of respect. You follow me, don't you?

"And, you know, nothing touched me, after all! So that, in a little while, I had got back a bit to my normal, and felt

steady enough to go through with the business without any more funkings.

"I daresay a couple of minutes passed; and then, away up near the chancel, there came again that clang, as though an armoured foot stepped cautiously. It made me stiffen. And suddenly the thought came that the sound I heard might be the rattle of the dagger above the altar. It was a particularly sensible notion; for the sound was far too heavy and resonant for such a cause. Yet, as can be easily understood, my reason was bound to submit somewhat to my fancy at such a time.

"I remember now, that the idea of that insensate thing becoming animate, and attacking me, did not occur to me with any sense of possibility or reality. I thought rather, in a vague way, of some invisible monster of outer space fumbling at the dagger. I remembered the old Rector's description of the attack on the butler. . . OUT OF THE VOID. And he had described the stupendous force of the blow as being 'like the kick of a great horse.' You can see how uncomfortably my thoughts were running.

"I felt round swiftly and cautiously for my lantern. I found it close to me, on the pew seat, and with a sudden, jerky movement, I switched on

the light. I flashed it up the aisle, to and fro across the chancel; but I could see nothing to frighten me. I turned quickly, and sent the jet of light darting across and across the rear end of the Chapel; then on each side of me, before and behind, up at the roof and down at the marble floor; but nowhere was there any visible thing to put me in fear; not a thing that need have set my flesh thrilling; just the quiet Chapel, cold and eternally silent. You know the feeling.

"I had been standing, whilst I sent the light about the Chapel; but now I pulled out my revolver, and then, with a tremendous effort of will, switched off the light, and sat down again in the darkness, to continue my constant watch.

"It seemed to me that quite half an hour, or even more, must have passed, after this, during which no sound had broken the intense stillness. I had grown less nervously tense; for the flashing of the light round the place had made me feel less out of all bounds of the normal—it had given me something of that unreasoned sense of safety that a nervous child obtains at night, by covering its head up with the bedclothes. This just about illustrates the completely human illogicalness of the workings of my feelings;

for, as you know, whatever Creature, Thing, or Being it was that had made that extraordinary and horrible attack on the old butler, it had certainly not been *visible*.

"And so you must picture me sitting there in the dark; clumsy with armour, and with my revolver in one hand, and nursing my lantern, ready, with the other. And then it was, after this little time of partial relief from intense nervousness, that there came a fresh strain on me; for somewhere in the utter quiet of the Chapel I thought I heard something. I listened, tense and rigid, my heart booming just a little in my ears for a moment; then I thought I heard it again. I felt sure that something had moved at the top of the aisle.

"I strained in the darkness, to hark; and my eyes showed me blackness within blackness, wherever I glanced, so that I took no heed of what they told me; for even if I looked at the dim loom of the stained window at the top of the chancel, my sight gave me the shapes of vague shadows passing noiseless and ghostly across, constantly. There was a time of almost peculiar silence, horrible to me, as I felt just then. And suddenly I seemed to hear a sound again, nearer to me, and repeated, infinitely stealthy. It

was as if a vast, soft tread were coming slowly down the aisle.

"Can you imagine how I felt? I do not think you can. I did not move, any more than the stone effigies on the two tombs; but sat there, *stiffened*. I fancied now, that I heard the tread all about the Chapel. And then, you know, I was just as sure in a moment that I could not hear it—that I had never heard it.

"Some particularly long minutes passed, about this time; but I think my nerves must have quietened a bit; for I remember being sufficiently aware of my feelings, to realise that the muscles of my shoulders *ached*, with the way that they must have been contracted, as I sat there, hunching myself, rigid. Mind you, I was still in a disgusting funk; but what I might call the imminent sense of danger seemed to have eased from around me; at any rate, I felt, in some curious fashion, that there was a respite—a temporary cessation of malignity from about me. It is impossible to word my feelings more clearly to you; for I cannot see them more clearly than this, myself.

"Yet, you must not picture me as sitting there, free from strain; for the nerve tension was so great that my heart action was a little out of normal

control, the blood-beat making a dull booming at times in my ears, with the result that I had the sensation that I could not hear acutely. This is a simply beastly feeling, especially under such circumstances.

"I was sitting like this, listening, as I might say with body and soul, when suddenly I got that hideous conviction again that something was moving in the air of the place. The feeling seemed to stiffen me, as I sat, and my head appeared to tighten, as if all the scalp had grown *tense*. This was so real, that I suffered an actual pain, most peculiar and at the same time intense; the whole head pained. I had a fierce desire to cover my face again with my mailed arms; but I fought it off. If I had given way then to that, I should simply have bunked straight out of the place. I sat and sweated coldly—that's the bald truth—with the 'creep' busy at my spine...

"And then, abruptly, once more I thought I heard the sound of that huge, soft tread on the aisle; and this time closer to me. There was an awful little silence, during which I had the feeling that something enormous was bending over towards me, from the aisle. And then, through the booming of the blood in my ears, there came a

slight sound from the place where my camera stood—a disagreeable sort of slithering sound, and then a sharp tap. I had the lantern ready in my left hand, and now I snapped it on, desperately, and shone it straight above me; for I had a conviction that there was something there. But I saw nothing.

"Immediately, I flashed the light at the camera, and then along the aisle; but again there was nothing visible. I wheeled round, shooting the beam of light in a great circle about the place; to and fro I shone it, jerking it here and there; but it showed me nothing.

"I had stood up, the instant that I had seen that there was nothing in sight over me, and now I determined to visit the chancel, and see whether the dagger had been touched. I stepped out of the pew into the aisle; and here I came to an abrupt pause; for an almost invincible, sick repugnance was fighting me back from the upper part of the Chapel. A constant, queer prickling went up and down my spine, and a dull ache took me in the small of the back, as I fought with myself to conquer this sudden new feeling of terror and horror. I tell you, that no one, who has not been through these kinds of experiences, has any

idea of the sheer, *actual physical pain* attendant upon, and resulting from, the intense nerve-strain that ghostly-fright sets up in the human system.

"I stood there, feeling positively ill. But I got myself in hand, as it were, in about half a minute, and then I went, walking, I expect, as jerky as a mechanical tin man, and switching the light from side to side, before and behind, and over my head continually. And the hand that held my revolver, sweated so much, that the thing fairly slipped in my fist. Does not sound very heroic, does it?

"I passed through the short chancel, and reached the step that led up to the small gate in the chancel-rail. I threw the beam from my lantern upon the dagger. Yes, I thought, it's all right. Abruptly, it seemed to me that there was something wanting, and I leaned forward over the chancel-gate to peer, holding the light high. My suspicion was hideously correct. *The dagger had gone.* Only the cross-shaped sheath hung there above the altar.

"In a sudden, frightened flash of imagination, I pictured the thing adrift in the Chapel, moving here and there, as though of its own volition; for whatever Force wielded it, was certainly beyond visibility. I turned my head stiffly over to

the left, glancing frightenedly behind me, and flashing the light to help my eyes. In the same instant, I was struck a tremendous blow over the left breast, and hurled backward from the chancelrail, into the aisle, my armour clanging loudly in the horrible silence. I landed on my back, and slithered along on the polished marble. My shoulder struck the corner of a pew front, and brought me up, half stunned.

"I scrambled to my feet, horribly sick and shaken, but the fear that was on me making little of this at the moment. I was minus both revolver and lantern, and utterly bewildered as to where I was standing. I bowed my head, and made a scrambling run in the complete darkness, and dashed into a pew. I jumped back, staggering, got my bearings a little, and raced down the centre of the aisle, putting my mailed arms over my face. I plunged into my camera, hurling it among the pews. I crashed into the font, and reeled back. Then I was at the exit.

"I fumbled madly in my dressing-gown pocket for the key. I found it and scraped at the door, feverishly, for the keyhole. I found the keyhole; turned the key; burst the door open, and was into the passage. I slammed the door, and leant

hard against it, gasping, whilst I felt crazily again for the keyhole, this time to lock the door upon what was in the Chapel. I succeeded, and began to feel my way stupidly along the wall of the corridor. Presently I had come to the big hall, and so in a little to my room.

"In my room, I sat for a while, until I had steadied down something to the normal. After a time I commenced to strip off the armour. I saw then that both the chain-mail and the plate-armour had been pierced over the breast. And, suddenly, it came home to me that the Thing had struck for my heart.

"Stripping rapidly, I found that the skin of the breast, over the heart, had been cut sufficiently to allow a little blood to stain my shirt; nothing more. Only, the whole breast was badly bruised and intensely painful. You can imagine what would have happened if I had not worn the armour. In any case, it is a marvel that I was not knocked senseless.

"I did not go to bed at all that night; but sat upon the edge, thinking, and waiting for the dawn; for I had to remove my litter, before Sir Alfred Jarnock should enter, if I were to hide from him the fact that I had managed a duplicate key.

"So soon as the pale light of

the morning had strengthened sufficiently to show me the various details of my room, I made my way quietly down to the Chapel. Very silently, and with tense nerves, I opened the door. The chill light of the dawn made distinct the whole place—everything seeming instinct with a ghostly, unearthly quiet. I waited several minutes at the door, allowing the morning to grow, and likewise my courage, I suppose. Presently, the rising sun threw an odd beam right in through the big, East window, making coloured sunshine all the length of the Chapel. And then, with a tremendous effort, I forced myself to enter.

"I went up the aisle, to where I had overthrown my camera in the darkness. The legs of the tripod were sticking up from the interior of a pew, and I expected to find the machine smashed to pieces; yet, beyond that the ground glass was broken, there was no real damage done.

"I replaced the camera in the position from which I had taken the previous photographs; but the slide containing the plate I had exposed by flashlight, I removed and put into one of my side pockets, regretting that I had not taken a second flash-picture at the instant when I heard those

strange sounds up in the chancel.

"Having tidied my photographic apparatus, I went into the chancel, to recover my lantern and revolver, which had both—as you know—been knocked from my hands when I was stabbed. I found the lantern lying, hopelessly bent, with smashed lens, just under the pulpit. My revolver I must have held, until my shoulder struck the pew; for it was lying there in the aisle, about where I believe I cannoned into the pew-corner. It was quite undamaged.

"Having secured these two articles, I walked up to the chancel-rail, to see whether the dagger had returned, or been returned, to its sheath above the altar. Before, however, I reached the chancel-rail, I had a slight shock; for there, on the floor of the chancel, about a yard away from where I had been struck, lay the dagger, quiet and demure upon the polished marble pavement. I wonder whether you will, any of you, understand the nervousness that took me at the sight of the thing. With a sudden, unreasoned action, I jumped forward and put my foot on it, to hold it there. And, you know, I could not stoop down and pick it up with my hands,

for quite a minute; I should think.

"Afterwards, when I had done so, however, and handled it a little, this feeling passed away, and my Reason—and also, I expect, the daylight—made me feel that I had been a little bit of an ass. Quite natural, though, I assure you! Yet it was a new kind of fear to me. I'm taking no notice of the cheap joke about the ass! I am talking about the curiousness of learning in that moment a new shade or quality of fear, that had hitherto been outside of my knowledge or imagination. Does it interest you?

"I examined the dagger, minutely, turning it over and over in my hands, and never—as I suddenly discovered—holding it loosely. It was as if I were subconsciously surprised that it lay quiet in my hands. Yet even this feeling passed, largely, after a short while. The curious weapon showed no signs of the blow, except that the dull colour of the blade was slightly brighter on the rounded point, that had cut through the armour.

"Presently, when I had made an end of staring at the dagger, I went up the chancel step, and in through the little gate. Then, kneeling upon the altar, I replaced the dagger in its sheath, and came outside of the

rail, again, closing the gate after me, and feeling awfully uncomfortable, because the horrible old weapon was back again in its accustomed place. I suppose, without analysing my feelings very deeply, I had an unreasoned and only half conscious belief that there was a greater probability of danger, when the dagger hung in its five-century resting place, than when it was out of it.

"Yet, somehow I don't think this is a very good explanation, when I remember the *demure* look the thing seemed to have, when I saw it lying on the floor of the chancel. Only I know this, that when I had replaced the dagger I had quite a touch of nerves, and I stopped only to pick up my lantern, from where I had placed it whilst I examined the weapon; after which I went down the quiet aisle at a pretty quick walk, and so got outside of the place.

"That the nerve tension had been considerable, I realised, when I had locked the door behind me. I felt no inclination now to think of old Sir Alfred as a hypochondriac because he had taken such hyper-seeming precautions regarding the Chapel. I had a sudden wonder as to whether he might not have some knowledge of a long prior tragedy, in which the dagger had been concerned.

"I returned to my room, washed, shaved and dressed; after which I read awhile. Then I went downstairs and got the acting butler to give me some sandwiches and a cup of coffee.

"Half an hour later, I was heading for Burtontree, as hard as I could walk; for a sudden idea had come to me, which I was anxious to test. I reached the town a little before eight-thirty, and found the local photographer with his shutters still up. I did not wait, but knocked until he appeared with his coat off, evidently in the act of dealing with his breakfast. In a few words, I made clear that I wanted the use of his dark room immediately; and this, he at once placed at my disposal.

"I had brought with me the slide which contained the plate that I had used with the flashlight; and as soon as I was ready, I set to work to develop. Yet, it was not the plate which I had exposed, that I first put into the solution; but the second plate, which had been ready in the camera during all the time of my waiting in the darkness. You see, the lens had been uncapped all that while, so that the whole chancery had been, as it were, under observation.

"You all know something of my experiments in 'Lightless Photography,' that is, 'Light-

less' so far as our eyes are capable of appreciating light. It was X-ray work that started me in that direction. Yet, you must understand, though I was attempting to develop this 'unexposed' plate, I had no definite idea of results—nothing more than a vague hope that it might show me something.

"Yet, because of the possibilities, it was with the most intense and absorbing interest that I watched the plate, under the action of the developer. Presently, I saw a faint smudge of black appear in the upper part, and after that others, indistinct and wavering of outline. I held the negative up to the light. The marks were rather small, and were almost entirely confined to one end of the plate; but, as I have said, lacked definiteness. Yet, such as they were, they were sufficient to make me very excited, and I shoved the thing quickly back into the solution.

"For some minutes further I watched it; lifting it out once or twice to make a more exact scrutiny; but could not imagine what the markings might represent, until, suddenly, it occurred to me that, in one or two places, they certainly had shapes suggestive of a cross-hilted dagger. Yet, the shapes were sufficiently indefinite to make me careful not to let

myself be over-impressed by the uncomfortable resemblance. Though, I must confess, the very thought was sufficient to set some odd thrills adrift in me.

"I carried development a little further; then put the negative into the hypo, and commenced work upon the other plate. This came up nicely, and very soon I had a really decent negative, that appeared similar in every respect—except for the difference of lighting—to the negative I had taken during the previous day. I fixed the plate; then, having washed both it and the 'unexposed' one for a few minutes under the tap, I put them into methylated spirits for fifteen minutes; after which I carried them into the photographer's kitchen, and dried them in the oven.

"Whilst the two plates were drying, the photographer and I made an enlargement from the negative I had taken by daylight. Then we did the same with the two that I had just developed, washing them as quickly as possible, for I was not troubling about the permanency of the prints, and drying them with spirits.

"When this was done, I took them to the window, and made a thorough examination, commencing with the one that

appeared to show shadowy daggers in several places. Yet, though it was now enlarged, I was still unable to feel convinced that the marks truly represented anything abnormal; and because of this, I put it on one side, determined not to let my imagination play too large a part in constructing weapons out of the indefinite outlines.

"I took up the two other enlargements, both of the chancel, as you will remember, and commenced to compare them. For some minutes, I examined them, without being able to distinguish any difference in the scene they portrayed; and then, abruptly, I saw something in which they varied. In the second enlargement—the one made from the flashlight negative—the dagger was not in its sheath. Yet, I had felt sure it was there, but a few minutes before I took the photograph.

"After this discovery, I began to compare the two enlargements, in a very different manner from my previous scrutiny. I borrowed a pair of calipers from the photographer, and with these I carried out a most methodical and exact comparison of the details shown in the two photographs.

"Suddenly, I came upon something that set me all tingling with excitement. I

threw the calipers down, paid the photographer, and walked out through the shop, into the street. The three enlargements, I took with me, making them into a roll, as I went. At the corner of the street, I had the luck to get a cab, and was soon back at the castle.

"I hurried up to my room, and put the photographs away; then I went down to see whether I could find Sir Alfred Jarnock; but Mr. George Jarnock, who met me, told me that his father was too unwell to rise, and would prefer that no one entered the Chapel, unless he were about.

"Young Jarnock made a half apologetic excuse for his father; remarking that Sir Alfred Jarnock was perhaps inclined to be a little over careful; but that, considering what had happened, we must agree that the need for his carefulness had been justified. He added, also, that even before the horrible attack on the butler, his father had been just as particular, always keeping the key, and never allowing the door to be unlocked, except when the place was in use for Divine Service, and for an hour each forenoon, when the cleaners were in.

"To all this, I nodded, understandingly; but when, presently, the young man left me, I took my duplicate key;

and made for the door of the Chapel. I went in, and locked it behind me; after which I carried out some intensely interesting and rather weird experiments. These proved successful to such an extent, that I came out of the place in a perfect fever of excitement. I inquired for Mr. George Jarnock, and was told that he was in the morning room.

"Come along," I said, when I had found him. "Please give me a lift. I've something exceedingly strange to show you."

"He was palpably very much puzzled; but came quickly. As we strode along, he asked me a score of questions, to all of which I just shook my head, asking him to wait a little.

"I led the way to the Armoury. Here, I suggested that he should take one side of a dummy, dressed in half-plate armour, whilst I took the other. He nodded, though obviously vastly bewildered, and together we carried the thing to the Chapel door. When he saw me take out my key, and open the way for us, he appeared even more astonished; but held himself in, evidently waiting for me to explain. We entered the Chapel, and I locked the door behind us, after which we carted the armoured dummy up the aisle to the gate in the chancel-rail, where we put it

down upon its round, wooden stand.

"Stand back!" I shouted, suddenly, as young Jarnock made a movement to open the gate. 'My God, man! you mustn't do that!'

"Do what?" he asked, half startled and half irritated by my words and manner.

"One minute," I said, 'Just stand to the side a moment, and watch.'

"He stepped to the left, whilst I took the dummy in my arms, and turned it to face the altar, so that it stood close to the gate. Then, standing well away on the right side, I pressed the back of the thing, so that it leant forward a little upon the gate, which flew open. In the same instant, the dummy was struck a tremendous blow, that hurled it into the aisle, the armour rattling and clanging upon the polished marble floor.

"Good God!" shouted young Jarnock, and ran back from the chancel-rail, his face very white.

"Come and look at the thing," I said, and led the way to where the dummy lay, its armoured upper limbs all splayed adrift in queer contortions. I stooped over it, and pointed. There, driven right through the thick steel breast-plate, was the 'waeful dagger.'

"Good God!" said young

Jarnock, again. 'Good God! It's the dagger! The thing's been stabbed, same as Bellett!'

"Yes," I replied, and saw him glance swiftly towards the entrance of the Chapel. But I will do him the justice to say that he never budged an inch.

"Come and see how it was done," I said; and led the way back to the chancel-rail.

"From the wall to the left of the altar, I took down a long, curiously ornamented, iron instrument, not unlike a short spear. The sharp end of this I inserted in a hole in the left-hand gate-post of the chancel gateway. I lifted hard, and a section of the post, from the floor upwards, bent inwards towards the altar, as though hinged at the bottom. Down it went, leaving the remaining part of the post standing. As I bent the movable portion lower, there came a quick click, and a section of the floor slid to one side, showing a long, shallow cavity, sufficient to enclose the post. I put my weight to the lever, and hove the post down into the niche. Immediately, there was a sharp clang, as some catch snicked in, and held it against the powerful operating spring.

"I went over now to the dummy, and after a few minutes' work, managed to wrench the dagger loose out of

the armour. I brought the old weapon, and placed its hilt in a hole near the top of the post, where it fitted loosely, the point upwards. After that, I went again to the lever and gave another strong heave, and the post descended about a foot, to the bottom of the cavity, catching there, with another clang. I withdrew the lever, and the narrow strip of floor slid back, covering post and dagger, and looking no different from the surrounding surface.

"Then I shut the chancel-gate, and we both stood well to one side. I took the spear-like lever, and gave the gate a little push, so that it opened. Instantly, there was a loud thud, and something sang through the air, striking the bottom wall of the Chapel. It was the dagger. I showed Jarnock then that the other half of the post had sprung back into place, making the whole post as thick as the one upon the righthand side of the gate.

"There!" I said, turning to the young man, and tapping the divided post. "There's the 'invisible' thing that uses the dagger; but who, the deuce, is the person who sets the trap?" I looked at him, keenly, as I spoke.

"My father is the only one who has a key," he said. "So it's

practically impossible for anyone to get in and meddle."

"I looked at him, again; but it was obvious that he had not yet reached out to any conclusion.

"See here, Mr. Jarnock," I said, perhaps rather curter than I should have done, considering what I had to say. "Are you quite sure that Sir Alfred is quite balanced—mentally?"

"He looked at me, half frightenedly, and flushing a little. I realised then how baldly I had put it.

"I—I don't know," he replied, after a slight pause, and was then silent, expect for one or two incoherent half-remarks.

"Tell the truth," I said. "Haven't you suspected something, now and again? You needn't be afraid to tell me."

"Well," he answered, slowly, "I'll admit I've thought father a little—a little strange, perhaps, at times. But I've always tried to think I was mistaken. I've always hoped no one else would see it. You see, I'm very fond of the old guv'nor."

"I nodded.

"Quite right, too," I said. "There's not the least need to make any kind of scandal about this. We must do something, though, but in a quiet way. No fuss, you know. I should go and have a chat with your father and tell him we've found out

about this thing.' I touched the divided post.

"Young Jarnock seemed very grateful for my advice, and after shaking my hand, pretty hard, took my key, and let himself out of the Chapel. He came back in about an hour, looking rather upset. He told me that my conclusions were perfectly correct. It was Sir Alfred Jarnock who had set the trap, both on the night that the butler was nearly killed, and on the past night. Indeed, it seemed that the old gentleman had set it every night for many years. He had learnt of its existence from an old MS.-book in the Castle library. It had been planned and used in an earlier age as a protection for the gold vessels of the Ritual, which were, it seemed, kept in a hidden recess at the back of the altar.

"This recess, Sir Alfred Jarnock had utilised, secretly, to store his wife's jewellery. She had died some twelve years back, and the young man told me that his father had never seemed quite himself, since.

"I mentioned to young Jarnock how puzzled I was that the trap had been set *before* the service, on the night that the butler was struck; for, if I understood him aright, his father had been in the habit of setting the trap late every night,

and unsettling it each morning, before anyone entered the Chapel. He replied that his father, in a fit of temporary forgetfulness—natural enough in his neurotic condition—must have set it too early, and hence what had so nearly proved a tragedy.

"That is about all there is to tell. The old man is not—so far as I could learn—really insane in the popularly accepted sense of the word. He is extremely neurotic, and has developed into a hypochondriac. The whole condition probably brought about by the shock and sorrow resultant on the death of his wife, leading to years of sad broodings and to overmuch of his own company and thoughts. Indeed, young Jarnock told me that his father would sometimes pray for hours together, alone in the Chapel."

CARNACKI made an end of speaking, and leant forward for a spill.

"But you've never told us just *how* you discovered the secret of the divided post, and all that," I said, speaking for the four of us.

"Oh, that!" replied Carnacki, puffing vigorously at his pipe. "I found—on comparing the—photos, that the one—taken in the—daytime, showed

a thicker left-hand gate-post, than the one taken at night by the flashlight. That put me on to the track. I saw at once that there might be some mechanical dodge at the back of the whole queer business, and nothing at all of an abnormal nature. I examined the post, and the rest was simple enough, you know.

"By the way," he continued, rising and going to the mantelpiece, "you may be interested to have a look at the so-called 'waeful dagger.' Young Jarnock was kind enough to present it to me, as a little memento of my adventure."

He handed it round to us, and whilst we examined it, stood silent before the fire, puffing meditatively at his pipe.

"Jarnock and I made the trap so that it won't work," he remarked, after a few moments. "I've got the dagger, as you see; and old Bellett's getting about again, so that the whole business can be hushed up, decently. All the same, I fancy the Chapel will never lose its reputation as a dangerous place. Should be pretty safe now to keep valuables in."

"There's two things you haven't explained yet," I said. "What do you think caused the two clangey sounds when you were in the Chapel in the dark? And do you believe the soft tready sounds were real, or only

a fancy, with your being so worked up and tense?"

"Don't know, for certain, about the clangs," replied Carnacki. "I've puzzled quite a bit about them. I can only think that the spring, which worked the post, must have 'given' a trifle, slipped, you know, in the catch. If it did, under such a tension, it would make a bit of a ringing noise. And a little sound goes a long way, in the middle of the night, when you're thinking of 'ghostesses.' You can understand that—eh?"

"Yes," I agreed. "And the other sounds?"

"Well, the same thing—I mean the extraordinary quietness—may help to explain these a bit. They may have been some usual enough sound, that would never have been noticed under ordinary conditions; or they may have been only fancy. It is just impossible to say. They were disgustingly real to me. As for the slithery noise, I am pretty sure that one of the tripod legs of my camera must have slipped a few inches; if it did so, it may easily have jolted the lenscap off the base-board, which would account for that queer little tap which I heard directly after."

"How do you account for the dagger being in its place above the altar, when you first

examined it that night?" I asked. "How could it be there, when at that very moment it was set in the trap?"

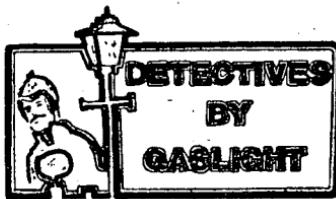
"That was my mistake," replied Carnacki. "The dagger could not possibly have been in its sheath at the time; though I thought it was. You see, the curious cross-hilted sheath gave the appearance of the complete weapon, as you can understand. The hilt of the dagger protrudes very little above the continued

portion of the sheath—a most inconvenient arrangement for drawing quickly!"

He nodded, sagely, at the lot of us, and yawned.

"Out you go!" Carnacki said, in friendly fashion, using the recognised formula. "I want a sleep."

We rose, shook him by the hand, and went out presently into the night and the quiet of the Embankment; and so to our homes.



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When you paint a picture of Murder—don't sign your name!

"WHAT DID you find out?" Inspector Mead asked.

"Scarcely anything of use," I said flatly.

The inspector sensed my disillusionment. "Well, don't take it to heart," he smiled. "It's early days yet. It's less

than forty eight hours since Cantor was murdered."

Mead reached for a pencil and sheet of paper. "Let's recap," he said. He liked to put everything on paper and regard it as an algebraic problem.

"Philip Cantor," he wrote,

underlining it. Then aloud writing as he spoke: "Aged fifty five. Reasonably successful artist. Conducted an art school."

He looked up. "How long had he been running the art school?"

"Three months," I said.

"How many were studying there?"

I had the answer pat. "Five. Oddly enough, all men."

"Young men?" inquired Mead.

"Well, four were. The fifth was about Cantor's age."

Mead noted this information, then asked: "And you've seen them all?"

"The lot," I said with rueful smile. "On the surface they all have sound alibis. They all seem to have been variously occupied at the time Cantor was strangled in the room over his studio—about ten o'clock last night."

I was anxious to impress the inspector with my grasp of the facts.

Mead smiled. "Any woman involved anywhere?"

"Not as a student," I said. "There is a model—Joyce Carr. She posed occasionally for the students."

"Have you spoken to her?"

"Well, yes," I said, "but she was not alone. She was with Burke when I went along to see

her, and I—er—killed two birds with one stone."

"Burke?" the inspector repeated; he always pretended to know nothing.

"The older art student—the one in his fifties," I said.

Mead's pencil moved over the paper as he asked: "And this girl Joyce Carr had an alibi, too, I take it?"

"Well, she and Burke provided an alibi for each other," I told him a little uncertainly. "Apparently he was at her apartment when Cantor was murdered."

"Sure of that?" the inspector said.

"I haven't been able to disprove it," I replied.

"Interesting," Mead said, tapping his teeth with the pencil.

"Have these two been having an affair?"

"It looks possible," I conceded.

"How well did Cantor know this model?"

I swallowed. "I haven't really had time yet to go into that," I said.

The inspector smiled. "Or perhaps you didn't think of it." He got up and walked to the window. "You know where this girl Carr lives?"

"Of course," I said. "She has an apartment at Western Court."

"Go and talk to her—on her own," Mead said.

I shrugged. "Okay, but, frankly—

Mead smiled. "I often work on hunches, as you'll find out in due course. I have ideas about Joyce Carr." He paused. "Have you studied the police doctor's report?"

"Not yet. Does it help?"

"It might," Mead said. He folded a document and passed it to me. "Study it on your way there."

Within half an hour I was pressing the doorbell of Joyce Carr's apartment.

The model opened the door. She recognized me from the previous meeting at which Burke had been present.

"There are a few small points I want to clear up," I told her.

"Of course," she said, motioning me to enter. She was pale, and her eyes indicated that she had not been sleeping. "A drink?"

"No, thank you."

She poured herself a drink nervously and asked: "Any luck?"

"We're progressing slowly," I told her. "The police surgeon has confirmed something we suspected."

"Yes?"

"We think Cantor was murdered by a left-handed man," I said quietly. "Or an

is the

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ambidexterous one. One can't speak with finality on that point."

Her waxen face revealed nothing. My eyes strayed to the

wall behind her chair. "Those are nice," I commented, nodding towards some pencil drawings.

She smiled. "Yes," she said. "They're drawings from this window—of the park opposite."

I got up and looked at them closely. "Yours?" I asked.

She shook her head.

"I'm not an artist," she said. "I'm a model."

"I gather your friend did them. . . Mr. Burke?" I said casually, staring at the drawings. She hesitated. "Mr. Burke—yes."

I sat down, eyeing her levelly.

"To come to the point, Miss Carr," I said, "we have reason to believe your friend Mr. Burke killed Cantor."

All the color drained from her face. She tried to outstare me, but suddenly her calm quivered and she hid her face in the palms of her hands.

"It would pay you to tell what you know," I said.

She sat twisting a handkerchief in her fingers. "I've been the friend of Harry Burke ever since my 'teens," she said in a low voice. "He became a sort of guardian when my parents were killed in an automobile accident. A deep affection developed." She looked up. "Too deep

an affection. He was jealous—and at the same time a man of violent temper."

"I see," I said. The picture began to take shape.

"He draws brilliantly. He didn't want art lessons," she said. "He went to Cantor's school to watch Cantor himself. You see, he knew that Cantor had begun to show an interest in me. . ."

She broke off and stared at me.

"But it wasn't premeditated. It was a struggle and. . ." Joyce Carr broke off again.

"Yes," I said, rising. "Perhaps I may use your phone?"

She nodded, quietly sobbing into her handkerchief.

"It was a hunch, Inspector, in a way," I told Mead. "It was when I looked at those pencil drawings on her wall. If you know something about art, you know something about the peculiarities of shading."

"Shading?"

"Yes," I said. "When shading in a drawing is done by a right-handed man, the strokes run from south-west to north-east. When it's done with the left-hand, the strokes run from south-east to north-west. You've only got to look at the left-handed work of Leonardo da Vinci. Try it yourself."

SWEET HOSTAGE

The desert keeps its secrets well. Soon it would have one more to keep. A walking dead man—sent in there by me...

by

JEFFREY M. WALLMANN

"LISTEN, SHE'S got to go," the driver said to Jeppeson.

Jeppeson, slouched against the—passenger—door, barely stirred. "I tol' you before, Gunther, it wouldn't be fair."

"What's being fair got to do with it?"

"We took her hostage at the bank and promised to let her go if we weren't stopped. Well, it wouldn't be fair not to keep our side of the bargain, seeing that the cops have."

"We just said that to get out of there. That's no promise."

"She's done us no harm, anyhow."

"Of all the stupid idiots, you—"

"Don't talk that way. I may



not have your smarts, but that don't give you no right to call me names."

Gunther, a ferret of a man, clenched his teeth together to keep from cursing. He gripped the steering wheel and peered through the dusty windshield with stinging, red-rimmed eyes, trying to avoid the worst of the pot-holes and still keep the car on the narrow track which wound through the desert.

The stolen car's air conditioning had given up during mid-morning, and the sun beat through the window on his left like a mailed fist. His only consolation was that in the afternoon, Jeppeson would be the one to suffer on his side of the car.

They were surrounded by creosote bush, cholla, and occasional suguara; broken country with razor-edged lava that would strip the tires or cripple a man on foot. All of it was void of water, and the only life were rattlers, gilas, and a few mangy coyotes. But they had to cross it in a southwest-erly direction to make the Mexican border without hitting road-blocks or patrols.

And that overgrown clod sitting beside him was the only one who knew the trails through the Arisonan wasteland. If it hadn't been for that, Gunther would have taken his

knife to Jeppeson and the woman both hours ago.

It had been such a sweet job, he thought acidly. Just damned fool luck it had turned just as sour. Gunther had made a nice living heisting small-town banks, picking up confederates like Jeppeson localled as needed. They knew the areas, and usually weren't too siwft when the time came to split the take.

When they were, there was always the knife. If his percentages were right, he ended up with more at less risk than if he'd been part of a gang overcoming alarms, cameras, and police that were all too often wide-awake and nearby.

The bank in Diamondback could've been blown over with a stiff wind. Jeppeson he'd picked up in the card room of a tavern in a neighboring town, and together they'd hit the bank soon as it had opened at the brink of dawn, farmer's hours. So who could have guessed the town cop would stroll by at the wrong moment, or that the old coot figured himself to be another Marshall Dillon?

He and Jeppeson had holed up in the bank, finally having to use the teller for a hostage to break their way clear. The woman had been so stiff with fear, they'd almost had to carry her out to the car, and all she

did now was sit in back and sniffle. My God, who *wouldn't* want to take a knife to a woman like that?

The sun moved into noon, a fire which was turning the car into a crematorium. Gunther panted, his tongue lolling. "Hey, gimme some water, Jeppeson."

Jeppeson picked up the solitary canteen and shook it. "Not much. Best you wait awhile longer if you can."

"Is it enough?"

Jeppeson shrugged. "Guess it'll have to be."

"There, you see? She *has* to go!" Gunther turned burning, frantic eyes on the other man. "There isn't enough for all three of us. She's got to be left behind so we can make it."

Jeppeson glanced at the woman behind him. She was a small brunette on the dark side of thirty, but still plenty pretty in a plain, faded sort of way. She huddled against the seat with her feet curled beneath her as if the two satchels of money on the floor could bite her. A plastic tag pinned to her blouse gave her name: *Miss Miriam Bates*. In spite of the intense heat, her face was chalky pale, her eyes round and glassy.

Jeppeson licked his dry lips, studying the perspiration spots along her arms and around the sides of her heavy breasts. Then

he looked at the driver again, his thick face set into sullenness. He had a throbbing headache, and if he'd been thin and wiry, he'd probably have felt as irritable and waspish as Gunther did. As it was, he felt obstinately stubborn.

"I don't like it, Gunther. It ain't right, leaving her out here in the desert without nothing to drink."

"We aren't killing her," Gunther pleaded. "She can walk it, and we'll have a chance to make the border."

"It ain't right."

The two men continued arguing, as they had since the air conditioner had broken.

Miriam Bates cringed, listened to them with dull horror. Brutes, both of them; beasts like all men were. She had a good life, living quietly with her cats and never, ever having anything to do with men and their evil ways. What had she done to deserve this? She felt shivers along her spine as the young, ugly oaf glanced her way again, and tears welled in her eyes. Even he was hardly better than an animal, and she knew he'd give in. Then she'd be left in the desert to die.

The miles drifted by in a backwash of rolling dust. They came to a fork in the trail, and Gunther stopped the car.

"Well?"



decide what we're going to do about her, and that's all there is to it. Tell you what, Jeppeson, we'll flip a coin."

"You'll cheat."

"How can I cheat flipping a coin?"

"I dunno, but you cheat at cards. I bet you've got a way."

"I don't, honest. Fair and square, and if you win, she stays."

Jeppeson frowned, looking to be in deep, if sluggish, thought.

"I swear, I won't drive another inch until this is settled."

After a long pause, Jeppeson murmured, "Okay. One toss."

Gunther wiped the back of his hand across his brow, grinned, and fumbled in his pocket for a quarter. Miriam Bates crouched frozen to the seat, wanting to say something, to scream and hit and claw at them, but it would have been useless. Her fate was sealed between two horrid men and a gamble of a coin. She sucked in her breath as Gunther balanced the coin.

"You call," Gunther said, flipping it.

"Tails."

Gunther slapped the coin to the back of his hand, then removed his fingers.

"Heads," he said. "Tough, you lose."

"To the left," Jeppeson said, nodding in that direction.

"How much further?"

"Forty, maybe fifty miles. Then we come to a town."

"They'll know who we are if we show up with her. *If*, Jeppeson, because there's no more water, is there?"

Jeppeson rattled the canteen. "A swallow, no more."

"That cracks it. We've got to

Jeppeson eyed Gunther malevolently, his lips pursed.

"Look, I didn't cheat, Jeppeson. She goes out right now."

"I suppose," Jeppeson said tightly. "I still don't think it's fair." He opened the car door and stepped out, then swung the seat forward and reached for the woman. "Sorry, Miss Bates."

"No! No, please! No!"

"Terrible sorry, but there's no other way. He won." Jeppeson had to drag her from the back seat, and she fought him with everything she had. But his strength was too great, and in spite of her wildness, he wrapped his thick arms around her and took her from the idling car. She threw herself violently from him.

As Jeppeson looked down at Miss Bates sprawled on the sand, he heard the car suddenly roar with power. He swiveled around, grabbing for the open door, but was too late. Gunther, having slipped the car back into gear, was moving the second his partner had been clear of the door with the woman. Jeppeson could only stand beside the trail, choking on the dust, hearing the mocking laughter of the other man as he drove away, down the left fork toward the border.

The young man stood there

another moment, his shoulders slumped dejectedly, his lip twitching slightly over his eye-tooth. Then he turned back to Miss Bates.

"Let me help you," he said in a gentle tone. "We've got a long walk ahead of us."

"Don't you dare touch me," Miriam cried.

"You take it easy." He stripped his shirt off and extended it to her. "We'll be all right, you'll see. You use this like a bonnet over your head so you won't get sunstroke."

Miriam glanced at the man, standing bare-chested before her, but she was too weak to protest further. And then, he was trying to help. She took the shirt hesitantly. "Th-thank you."

He waited until she was ready, and then he moved towards the right fork.

"But—" Miriam looked confused, glancing at him and then in the direction the car had taken. "But isn't that—"

"That's what I told him," Jeppeson said. "Come on, now."

Miriam walked behind Jeppeson, doggedly trying to keep up with his long strides. The sun flamed down on them, and the sand beneath her feet turned to fire. The distance shimmered with heat waves and mirage, an endlessly extending

nightmare. She wanted to ask more, but her throat was too parched and her lips cracked too painfully.

As the sun began to edge down towards the horizon, she stumbled, caught her balance, only to stumble again.

"I—I can't go on," she gasped plaintively.

"Here, Miss Bates. Here, hold onto me."

Miriam shrank back from the touch of a man.

"Hold me," he said in a firmer voice.

And she did. Swallowing her repulsion, she gripped Jeppeson as he placed an arm around her. She thought that perhaps staying here and dying might have been preferable, but then, he wouldn't have let her do that anyway...

She lost track of time or space. The last of the journey was done in a hazy fog, an exhaustion of staggering and groping. They seemed to be climbing over and between boulders, but she couldn't be sure. Distantly she heard Jeppeson order, "Drink," and then felt a warm splash of water on her face. The water came from a basin hollowed by centuries of rain erosion coming from the buttes above. She sank to her knees and drank.

Jeppeson kneeled beside her,

the crimson sunset flickering across the tanned muscles of his back, but she no longer cared. Eventually, filled and rested, she moved to where she could sit against an outcropping of rock. "Where—where are we?" she asked.

"Hills I know. A town is less than a day's walk now."

"But what about your friend?"

"Gunther's no friend of mine. He wanted to cheat me out of the money, and he's welcome to it. But I dunno where he's going to spend it out in the desert."

"You mean the trail he took—"

"Leads smack dab to the middle of nowhere."

"You lied to him on purpose! He'll die!"

"More 'n likely. If he hadn't been so damned greedy, I'd have told him different. And then there's you, Miss Bates."

"Me? You did this to save me?"

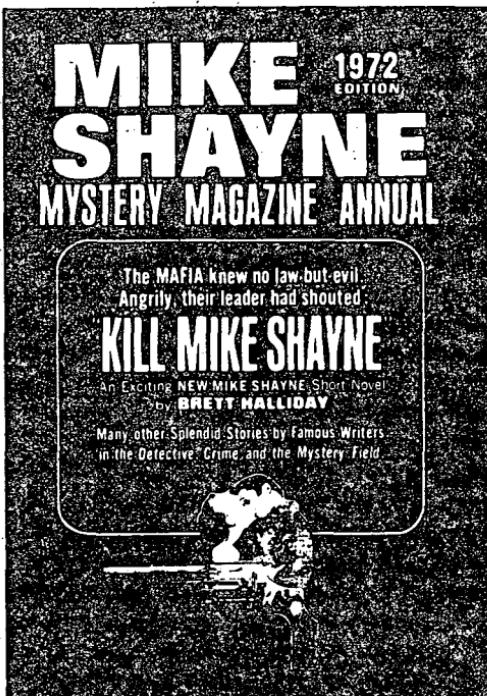
"Uh-huh. I told him it wasn't fair to leave you." Jeppeson's lips twitched again, and he rubbed the palms of his hands tensely down the sides of his trousers.

"Besides," he added, stepping closer to her, "I've never had me a woman. Before now..."

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When you play by the rules of the Mafia,
you play their way to the end—or else ...

THE TESTING

by

MICHAEL
ZUROY

THE BLACK Lincoln was parked in the circular driveway. The boss, with two bodyguards, got out and went up the walk towards the large, handsome house. The boss thought: maybe he didn't have to be so careful just visiting his brother, but this was his routine. A good routine. He was boss of the mob and alive. Others weren't even alive. All it took was one slip.

His brother's housekeeper opened the door. Her face openly showed dislike. Okay, he thought, some people didn't like him. But nobody pushed him, nobody skipped over him. He was big. He made people afraid or respectful and there were plenty who admired him.



He was somebody. He had to have it that way.

"They're in the study," the housekeeper said curtly.

"Thank you, Annie," he said, very polite.

He didn't blame her; she was a good woman, who'd cared for his brother and his family all these years. She was just afraid he might bring trouble here. She could be right, he thought, a little sadly. He hoped not.

"Make the boys comfortable, Annie," he said. He went into the study alone.

"Hello, Fizz." His brother Jim was taller, with a seamed face.

"How's it going, Jim?" He didn't look at his brother's son, Ricky. He sank into a leather chair, squat, powerful, groomed. "Still feel the same way, Jim?"

"I told you, I'm giving him to you. I made up my mind. Maybe you can make a man out of him."

"Maybe."

"It's his last chance," Jim said soberly. "I'm giving the bum one last chance. Look at him. My son, the bum."

The two men looked at Ricky as though he were an object. Ricky was lounging in his chair, a young man in his late twenties, dark and long-limbed. He wore casual, modish clothes.

"Oh, come on, Pop," Ricky said.

His father jabbed a finger. "Shut up."

"Don't butt in when we're talking, boy," Fizz rumbled.

"Who'd have thought I'd want him to go criminal?" Jim said. "But I'd rather see him a successful mobster like you than a nobody, a bum. I'd rather see him dead than a bum."

"Hell, not everybody can make out legit, Jim. You're a big builder. Myself, I ain't got the head for that, so I am what I am. Maybe this is his talent too."

"Martha gave me three sons," Jim said. "This is the lousy one."

"Now, Pop—" Ricky began.

"Shut up, I told you! You're the one who shortened her life. You're the one who worried and disturbed her always. Even as a kid, he sucked the blood out of her, Fizz. Before she died, she said to me, 'Straighten him out, Jim. Make a man out of him.' Well, I tried. You know the years I tried?"

"I know," Fizz said.

"He's rotten inside. He was born rotten. I tried to give him an education. He was thrown out of three colleges. Study was work, and Ricky doesn't work, not when he can drink and gamble and burn up the roads

and chase women. He got two girls into trouble. He slugged a professor. Cost me plenty—”

“He—” Ricky began.

His father's hand came up. “Shut up, or you get this, hoodlum. You're a tough guy, hey? Well, your old man's just a little tougher.”

“Got to be tough in this world,” Fizz said.

“You got to have something more, too,” Jim said. “Like you. Like me. He wasn't good at anything in college, wasn't even interested in sports, nothing to make his old man proud.”

“We're a proud family,” Fizz said.

“Okay, I thought, he's no student, I'll take him into the business. Make a builder out of him.”

“Sure, carry on the name. That would have been right,” Fizz said.

“He was no damn good. No good at working with his hands, no good at estimating, planning, selling, office work, nothing. He wouldn't work and he wouldn't learn. Just good with his fists. He lost me my best supervisor. Didn't like the way he talked, so he beat him up. Tough guy!”

“He comes in with me, we'll see how tough he is,” Fizz said.

“I gave him five years,” his brother said. “Only because I promised Martha I'd try. Then I

gave up. Maybe some other kind of work, I thought. I got him jobs, I got him opportunities men would give their right arms for. He blew them all. One place, he was caught stealing money. That cost me, to keep him out of jail.”

“Small-time stuff stinks,” Fizz said. “If you're going to take, you better take big.”

“That's all he does, is cost me. What have I got here? A twenty-eight year old bum, a sponger, a leech. *Isn't there anything you want to do?* I asked him. I would have helped him, financed him. No, nothing. I threw him out. You know what happened.”

“Yeah, I know.”

“He went on Welfare. Hung around with his crummy friends and let Welfare support him, a healthy lump like him. I was almost glad Martha hadn't lived to see this; it sure would have made her proud. I yanked him right back home; couldn't let the word get around that my son was on Welfare.”

“I guess that wouldn't have helped your business rep,” Fizz said.

“So now you take him into your mob, Fizz. I'll give him this last chance to prove himself at *something*. Maybe that's where he belonged all the time. Maybe he's a natural hood.”

“That's the only kind there

is," Fizz said. "Either he is or he ain't. We'll find out."

"He'd have money, right, Fizz?"

"Plenty."

"Wouldn't have to work?"

"Nothing I'd call work."

"You hear that, Rick? Money and no work. That's what you want, isn't it?" Jim's eyes held contempt and something that looked like hatred.

"Sure," Ricky said.

FIVE STAR Enterprises occupied a two-story building in a mixed commercial area. Downstairs, was the small office that served as a front, unoccupied at this time of the evening. Behind its walls was the lounge for the use of Fizz's men. Some of them were here now, drinking at the bar, playing pool, talking. Upstairs was the real office, where the records were kept. At the rear was Fizz's private office.

Fizz looked across his long desk at his nephew. He said, "Well, boy, it's you and me now. Your Pop has lost his patience. I ain't got none. You shape up quick or you don't make it. Okay?"

"You're calling it, Uncle," Ricky said.

The tone was careless. Fizz looked at his nephew's eyes. They weren't serious. That was the trouble with the boy, Fizz

thought; never been serious enough about anything. A man had to want. A man had to push hard for something, anything. Life wasn't always one big joke.

Fizz opened a drawer. He slid an automatic and a shoulder-holster across the desk. "That's yours. It's a Walther Mark II. Good gun. Take care of it. Floyd will show you about it before we go."

He saw that Ricky's eyes had narrowed. The gun was for real, no fun; maybe the eyes were seeing this. They'd better.

Ricky took the gun. His hands were natural on it. They liked the gun. Some guys were made for the gun. Maybe it would work out, Fizz thought.

He said: "Get this. Once you cross the line, there's no turning back."

"Sure," Ricky said.

"It's an easy life. Nobody bugs you, not even me. I ain't your old man. Live it up all you want. But when you're told to do something, you do it all the way."

"Like what?"

"Mostly simple little things. You carry a message. You talk to a man. You collect, you pay. You drive here, there. You stick around me and watch the system. Maybe later, you give orders."

Ricky grinned.

"But," Fizz said.

Ricky waited.

"Sometimes there's trouble," Fizz said.

"I don't scare."

"Sure, I know, you're a tough guy. Good with the fists. I mean more than fists."

"I know what you mean," Ricky said.

"It could be killing," Fizz said. "Get that? Killing. We try to avoid it. Sometimes we can't."

"Okay," Ricky said.

Fizz looked into his eyes again. They were still flat, indifferent. Fizz felt baffled. He'd never been able to make the kid out. Was it that he understood but didn't care? Was he a natural, the cold-blooded kind? Or was it just not getting through to him?

Fizz said: "So you're prepared for anything, hey?"

"Sure."

"Good. Good words. So much for words. Next, the test."

"What test?"

"You'll find out tonight. You pass, you're in."

"What do I have to do?"

"Cross the line," Fizz said. "You'll see."

It was almost an hour's drive. The derelict tavern was past the city limits, in an isolated, off-beat area of abandoned and sparsely spaced



buildings. They drove in over weeds and around to the back. No lights showed in the crumbling hulk.

"The mob owns this, under a phony name," Fizz said to Ricky. "Sometimes a place like this comes in handy."

There were other cars parked out back. A man moved from the shadows of a doorway. "It's all set up, Boss."

"Come on," Fizz said. They left the car, the man called Floyd coming with them. Inside the windowless entry, a single light burned. They went down a flight of stairs, through a door, and entered a cement walled basement room. Four or five

men looked at them with expressionless faces.

One of them said, "Here's the Boss."

Two men sat in chairs, facing the doorway. Their limbs were roped to the chairs.

Fizz lumbered over until he was looking down at them. He looked at them silently for moments. They were trying not to appear scared, but he saw that one man's leg was fitfully trembling. He said, without hostility, "Hi, boys."

The one who wasn't shaking said, "Hi, Fizz." He tried to smile. "How's it going?"

"Good," Fizz said. "You know, you shouldn't have tried to move in on us."

"We didn't mean—"

"Can it," Fizz said shortly.

"Okay, it was a mistake."

"It sure was," Fizz said.

"Everybody makes mistakes. Look, forget it and we'll do anything you say. Pay off, if you want. You want us to leave town, we'll blow. Anything you say, Fizz."

Fizz kept looking at them, not answering.

"Please, Fizz," the other man said desperately.

"Give us a break, Fizz. Maybe you'll need a break yourself sometime. We're not bad guys. How about it?"

Fizz turned away. When they started to beg, it was time

to end it. He didn't like to hear the begging.

He turned to Ricky. Ricky's eyes were watching the men with mild curiosity, as though this were a play, a show. What was it with this kid, Fizz wondered? Didn't he care or didn't he understand?

He said to Ricky, "This has to be done. That's why I brought you here at this time. Understand?"

"I guess so." He still didn't seem bothered, Fizz saw. It could be that the kid just had it, a great natural.

"Take out that gun I gave you," Fizz said.

Ricky pulled the automatic from the shoulder holster.

"Take it off safety."

The safety catch clicked.

"Now shoot these people," Fizz said.

Ricky's mouth opened. He stared at his uncle, not moving.

"Go ahead," Fizz said. "Shoot them."

"Me?"

"You. This is your test. You got to knock them off."

"Now?"

"Right now. Don't give it to them in the head," Fizz said in the voice of an instructor. "We don't want to mess up the place. In the heart. Just place the gun against the chest and fire. One. Two."

"You're kidding, Uncle."

Ricky's voice was strained now, shaky.

Fizz felt a deep sadness. Now, the kid was showing himself. He didn't look like a natural, after all. No games here; the real thing was getting through to him at last and he wasn't taking it. But he still might shape up. Fizz said, "I ain't kidding. Knock 'em off, you've made it. You got to get in deep. The mob got to trust you. A few seconds and it's over. Do it."

"I'm—not used to the idea. Give me a chance to get used to it. Maybe another time."

"Now. Or you're out."

"Their eyes, looking—"

"So plug them in the back."

"Fizz, no," one of the men said. "Please, no."

"Don't!" the other begged.

"Haven't you got a heart?" Ricky said.

Bad, Fizz thought. To be tough on top, not inside. He couldn't use this. "We got nothing to do with heart. What has to be done, has to be done. Finish them."

"I can't."

"Finish them."

"I can't. I won't."

Fizz said very patiently, gently. "Look, kid, your old man said you're no good, a bum, a leech. He said this is your last chance to show him you're good for *something*.

Let's show him, kid. You do it, I'll push you high. Okay?"

"No."

Fizz said, "I'm sorry, kid."

He went to the room where the phone was kept. He dialed.

"Jim?" he said, when the connection was made. "No good."

There was a brief silence. His brother's voice said, "You sure?"

"Sure. I tested him. My way. In this business, you got it or you don't. I can't use him."

"So he's not even good for that."

"That's it."

"Why did you call me?"

"I figured you needed a last chance to change your mind."

The silence was long, heavy. The voice said at last, "I'm not changing my mind."

"Tell me again."

"He's a curse to me. Do what I told you."

Fizz hung up. He went back to the other room.

Ricky's eyes turned to him and Fizz pulled his automatic and shot him.

The eyes were unbelieving. Fizz shot his nephew twice more and the eyes went out. He said to his silently watching men, "Take care of the other two. Dump the bodies. I'm going home."

Too bad, Fizz thought as he went out. A shame.

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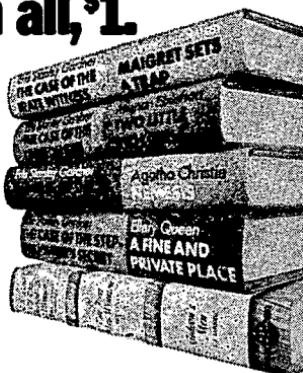
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